Tamil TIMES

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
UK/India/Sri Lanka.....£15/US$25
Australia.....Aus$45
(Australian bank cheques only)
Canada.....Can$40
USA.....US$35
All other countries.....£20/US$35

Vol XV1 No.4 ISSN 0266-4488 15 APRIL 1997 90p

Indian PM Deve Gowda

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★ GOWDA GOVT. FALLS

★ New Constitution Unveiled

★ DISAPPEARANCES RISE

★ Local Polls in Retrospect

★ DILEMMA OF THE INDIAN LEFT

★ Violence Against Women

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-Voltaire

Tamil TIMES

ISSN 0266 - 4488
Vol.XV1 No.4
15 APRIL 1997

Published by:

TAMIL TIMES LTD
P,O, BOX 121
SUTTON, SURREY SM1 3TD
UNITED KINGDOM

Phone: 0181-644 0972
Fax: 0181-241 4557

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

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The PA-UNP Agreement -What Next ?

The British brokered agreement between the ruling Peoples Alliance and the opposition United National Party has produced renewed interest in the prospect for a negotiated political solution to the protracted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

In the background of entrenched majoritarian chauvinsm opportunistically cultivated and fostered primarily by the two main political parties which have governed the country since independence leading to the present state of continuing war resulting in daily death and destruction, the agreement reached between the leaders of the two parties can be regarded as unprecedented in the island's recent history. It may be late in the day after so much of death and destruction, but it is not without significance that now both these parties "recognise that the resolution of the ethnic conflict will restore peace in Sri Lanka and lead to the development, progress and prosperity of the country and its people."

The fact is that previous attempts at solving the conflict have been thwarted by the main party of oppositon accusing the government of the day of betrayal of the "race, country and religion". If there had been a common and bipartisan approach, a solution could have been found as early as 1958 via the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, and the island could have developed into a model prosperous democracy in Asia. But at that time, the UNP in coalition with extremist elements compelled the abrogation of that accord which led to the escalation of the conflict. To give another example, the SLFP in the opposition whipped up popular unrest and antagonism to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987. If this had been allowed to be implemented to the full and the conflict resolved, the country could have been spared of a decade of debilitating war and tens of thousands of lives could have been saved. In this background, the agreement between the President and the Opposition Leader which recognises the ethnic conflict as "an issue transcending partisan politics" and binding themselves not to undermine the efforts of each other and adopt a bipartisan approach to a solution is of historic significance. The agreement has been well received both locally and internationally.

The commitment to the bipartisan approach contained in the agreement is predicated by the provision that "any discussions or decisions between the party in Government and any other party, group or person, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, aimed at resolving the ethnic conflict" must "have taken place with the concurrence of the party in opposition." It is therefore imperative that, if this approach is to be sustained, a mechanism and channel of communication be established between the President and the Leader of the Opposition so that "concurrence" could be guaranteed before and during discussions and before decisions are arrived at.

Not without significance is the specific reference to the LTTE which leads to the inescapable presumption that both parties to the agreement envisage discussions also with the LTTE "aimed at resolving the ethnic conflict." The LTTE being the primary protoganist on one side, its resposne to the new situation created by the agreement between the PA and the UNP is crucial to ending the ongoing war. There have been reports of the prospect of a resumption of negotiations between the government and the LTTE, though there appears to be no evidence of any moves being made in this direction by either side. However, recent pronouncements of the LTTE would appear to indicate that it would be ready to commence negotiations with third party mediation/facilitation. Now that a third party has played a useful role in bringing about the agreement between the PA and UNP, the government ought not to dismiss the possible usefulness of third party mediation/facilitation in any future negotiations with the LTTE.

However, the biggest stumbling block for any resumption of talks is the insistence on preconditions by both parties. The government's preconditions are that the LTTE should surrender its weapons, at least partially, and that it should agree on a time frame for commencement and conclusion of political negotiations. The LTTE's preconditions include withdrawal of troops from army controlled areas in the north, particularly from the Jaffna peninsula. It is unlikely either party would agree to these preconditions. Knowing that to be the case, insisting on such preconditions only mean that the parties to the conflict are still not committed to peace through a negotiated solution.

The new mood of optimism generated by the agreement between the ruling and opposition parties should not be allowed to be dissipated. The government and the LTTE ought to drop their preconditions and commence negotiations, with or without third party mediation/facilitation. The only precondition that should bind both parties is that each commits itself not to resume violence and armed hostilities until negotiatiations are concluded with a peaceful outcome.

NEWS REVIEW

Govt and UNP Agreement on Bipartisan Approach

Sri Lanka's ruling People's Alliance and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) have agreed to work together in adopting a bipartisan approach to the solution of the protracted ethnic conflict. It has been revealed that the agreement between the leaders of the two parties has been facilitated by the intervention of the British Foreign Minister Mr.Malcolm Rifkind, and efforts by the Under Secretary of State Dr.Liam Fox.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said in a statement on behalf of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe that the two parties were aiming at a "common approach" to solve the crisis. "The President and the Leader of the Opposition have exchanged letters about a number of arrangements which are intended to develop a common, cross-party approach - a bipartisan approach - towards the resolution of the ethnic conflict in our country," statement said.

President Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe exchanged letters in identical form and content binding themselves to a bipartisan approach. The letters dated 3 April 1997 addressed to each other and signed by the two leaders stated:

"I believe that we both recognise that the resolution of the ethnic conflict will restore peace in Sri Lanka and lead to the development, progress and prosperity of the country and its people. It is an issue transcending partisan politics. The development of a genuine bipartisan-partisan approach to the resolution of the ethnic conflict is vital to the achievement of a permanent solution to the conflict.

"Consequently, I would like to suggest the following arrangements between the Peoples Alliance and the United National Party which I intend to put to the appropriate decision making body of my party for ratification:

- the incumbent Head of Government will brief and seek the opinion of the Leader of the United National Party on significant developments relating to the ethnic conflict, both in the strictest confidence, if in Government, the Leader of the United National Party will reciprocate;
- the party in opposition will not undermine any discussions or decisions between the party in Government and any other party, group or person, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, aimed at resolving the ethnic conflict, if these discussions and decisions have taken place with the concurrence of the party in opposition;
- against the background of such concurrence, on election to Government either party will honour all such decisions in full."

In a statement with which the UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe agreed, Foreign Minister Kadirgamar said, "The need to restore peace is of overwhelming importance for progress in other areas in our country and for the prosperity of our people. It is a need which transcends party politics. There can be no doubt that a great many of us in Sri Lanka, irrespective of political persuasion, share this view and believe that efforts should be made to develop common approaches towards the resolution of the conflict.

"Against this background, I have had a number of discussions with Mr.Malcolm Rifkind, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and with Dr.Liam Fox, the Under Secretary of State, who has visited Sri Lanka twice in recent months, about the British experience of bipartisan-partisan approaches in relation to the problems of Northern Ireland. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition has had similar discussions. Dr.Fox's advice about this advice has proved to be most useful.

"I believe that the understanding between the parties announced today is an important and valuable step with much potential to help us to resolve a vital national issue. It deserves to be welcomed widely by our people and the friends of our country."

The British intervention via Dr.Liam Fox who appears to have been the kingpin behind the negotiations between the President and the leader of the UNP would seem to have had an impact on the way the two parties dealt with the government's devolution proposals during the campaign in the recently held local elections. According to university don Dr.J. Uyangoda, political commentators in Colombo had missed one important aspect of the local election campaign: neither the ruling PA nor the UNP made the government's devolution package an election issue. There perhaps was already an implicit understanding between the two main political parties not to politicise the devolution issue during the election.

Following the PA-UNP agreement, there were speculative reports in the Colombo press about British mediation in talks between the government and the LTTE with a view to resolution of the ethnic conflict. However, a press release from the foreign ministry quoting Kadirgamar said that the British-assisted bipartisan agreement between the PA and the UNP to work towards ending the country's ethnic war was not a prelude to foreign mediation in the matter. "The government was not contemplating mediation or facilitation by any foreign government or third party at this point of time. While acknowledging the help given by the British in forging the People's Alliance-UNP understanding, the implementation of this agreement is entirely a national matter," the statement added. The government has consistently expressed willingness to open a dialogue with the LTTE, subject to conditions including a substantial laying down of arms and an agreement to arrive at a settlement within a stipulated time frame," the statement said.

Responding to unconfirmed newspaper reports that Dr.Liam Fox has had talks with the LTTE and that he was going to play a mediation role, the British High Commission in Colombo issued a statement totally denying such reports. The statement said, "The British High Commission is concerned by the speculative nature of some of the comments in the Sri Lankan and Indian press alleging links between the British Government and the LTTE. There have been allegations that Dr.Fox has spoken to the LTTE or that his visit here was in some way connected with reports of a visit by Lawrence Tilakar to the Vanni.

"In fact Dr.Fox has had no contacts with the LTTE. His initiative was confined to discussions between the two Sri Lankan parties concerned, the People's Alliance and the United National Party, in order to share British experience in dealing with the IRA with them. At no time did Dr.Fox or the British Government have any discussions about this initiative with the LTTE. The British Government reaffirm that acts of terrorism are never justified for political purposes."

Agreement Welcomed

Hopes have risen for renewed peace talks to end Sri Lanka's protracted civil war following agreement by the two main political parties for a bipartisan-partisan approach to negotiations. The fact that the agreement refers to discussions with parties, including the LTTE, has raised the

prospect of a resumption of negotiations with the Tamil Tigers.

"The possibility of such (peace) talks has been clearly indicated in the statement. Such a statement could not have been issued without preparatory work," Neelan Thiruchelvam, a Member of Parliament belonging to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), told reporters. He said if talks were resumed the chances of success were higher than in the past when the ruling party was unsure of opposition support.

Foreign diplomats in Colombo said that there was a strong possibility that the government might be considering several possibilities, one of them being reopening talks with the LTTE in view its inability to subdue the LTTE and bring an end to the war and secondly due to international pressure.

However Foreign Ministry officials said that there were currently no moves to resume talks with the rebels or involve a third party to mediate to end the war. "The agreement among the two parties is on the table. Other than that there is no hidden agenda," one official said.

Some have described the agreement as a landmark political development in the recent history of the island. Since the 1950s, the two parties have vied with each other to portray itself as the better defender of the interests of the majority community, and each has undermined the efforts of the other to arrive at a negotiated settlement of the ethnic crisis.

In London, a Foreign Office press statement quoted deputy Foreign Minister Liam Fox as saying that Britain was glad that they were able to play a part in bringing about the agreement between the two parties and expressing hope that it would prove to be a significant step towards an eventual resolution of the Sri Lankan conflict. "I am delighted that the leaders of these two parties have agreed to adopt a bipartisan approach...I applaud the statesmanship they have shown and wish them well," Dr.Fox said.

The Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, issued a statement welcoming the decisions of the two parties and reminding the government that the remarkable achievement did not make the task of bringing peace to the lad easy, but the agreement had the potential to provide a foundation for a just and equitable solution to the ethnic conflict that has brought so much suffering. "There remains a lot of hard work for the Sri Lanka Government and the Opposition parties in overcoming their differences concerning the devolution package and reaching a bipartisan compromise, including ways of bringing the LTTE to the negotiating table," the Minister said.

"It is commendable that both the government and the opposition have put their country's best interests above those of party politics. The Australian Government has always been greatly concerned by the tragic suffering of civilians in Sri Lanka and the Government believes that only a peaceful negotiated settlement will bring an end to the human suffering wrought by the continuing conflict.... On behalf of the Government, I urge all Sri Lankan political parties and community groups to provide their wholehearted support for this agreement and to work together for a prosperous and harmonious future for Sri Lanka," the Minister said.

The agreement has been hailed as demonstrating a change of attitude among the island's politicians in regard to the conflict. "I hope it will be the beginning of an effort to solve this problem once and for all," President Chandrika Kumaratunga told government officials and diplomats in the capital Colombo.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar paid tribute to the UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe "for having risen above party politics of the day." But he cautioned it was too early to be too euphoric about the agreement. "In the long history of a problem, only the foolish will expect that on the morrow there is going to be some beautiful blossoms in the garden," he added.

The National Peace Council said, "The agreement can be considered to be major step forward in the search for a negotiated political solution to the ongoing war." Expressing the hope that the agreement would not be used to further sustain the war effort, the NPC noted that it was "encouraging that specific mention is made in the letters of agreement signed by the two leaders about negotiations with the LTTE. A sustainable and just peace cannot be achieved outside of negotiations."

In a statement addressed to the President and the UNP leader, the All Ceylon Hindu Congress has welcomed the agreement and called upon the two leaders to manifest their sincerity and commitment to solve the problems of the Tamil people by declaring a cease-fire and to expedite the process of finding a political solution.

TULF parliamentary leader group leader Joseph Pararajasingham observed that this was a significant move made by both major parties who have been ruling the country since independence. It was the non-unification oi these two major parties that had been the cause for the country facing the 21st century without a proper solution in sight, he said. "I have been advocating the settling of this matter and including the LTTE in whatever peace process. It is only with the participation of the LTTE that we can arrive at a solution. Wickramasinghe's move must be applauded. He as leader of the opposition is joining hands with the government to solve the problem. We greatly appreciate it," Pararajasingham added.

Rauf Hakeem, Secretary General of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, expressing applauding the move the two leaders said, "Ranil has acted like a statesman and I would say he has risen above petty politics. We are happy about it. But both leaders not signing a common document indicates that there is a gulf between these two. Hence both leaders must keep the present agreement as their base and go ahead to signing a common declaration."

Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, said he was pleased with the move by both leaders for having decided to agree on some framework to bring about a solution to the ethnic issue. "I admire Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe for his attempt to join with the President. He has understood the seriousness of the problem and we welcome this," Devananda said.

Devananda, himself an avowed opponent and a target of the LTTE, said he welcomed efforts to form a common platform on the ethnic crisis but added that Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka should be differentiated from the LTTE since the Tiger leader Pirabakaran had a separate agenda. "Coming together is important for a lasting political solution. But talking to the LTTE is different," said Devandanda.

M.Sivasithamparam, leader of the TULF, hailing the agreement said, "The past events in handling the ethnic problem have shown that the party which came to power and the party which was in the opposition were unable to reach a consensus among themselves in settling the ethnic issue. Several healthy pacts starting from the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam and the recent Indo-Sri Lanka Accord had failed miserably and they could not fulfil the aspirations of the Tamils. The present agreement reached between the Peoples Alliance and the UNP is a good step towards working out a conflict resolution agenda to solve the ethnic problem."

LTTE Reaction

The Tamil Tigers have not officially responded to the agreement between the UNP and the LTTE. However, their journals published within and outside the country have poured scorn on the parties to the agreement and others who attach much importance to it as a step towards helping to solve the ethnic question. Denying the speculative stories in newspapers about behind the scene contacts between the government and the LTTE, they have warned the people not to be deceived by such reports.

Referring to the parties to the agreement, the Tamil weekly "Eelamurasu" published from Paris describes the UNP and the SLFP as creatures that have been nurtured and nourished in the stinking pond of Sinhala chauvinism; during its 17 years in power, the UNP was engaged in genocidal war of destruction of the Tamil nation; the Chandrika government since it came to power has surpassed the UNP

in conducting the war against the Tamil nation; these two parties are not going to negotiate a political solution recognising the Tamil people as a separate nation; therefore when they talk about a political solution, that means imposing Sinhala chauvinist domination upon the Tamils.

The article in the "Eelamurasu" also answers the question it poses: For whose benefit is this agreement reached between such chauvinist parties ? Certainly it cannot be for the benefit of the Tamils; these parties have been historically responsible for deepening and escalating the ethnic conflict; they have been competing with each other as to who would better deprive more rights of the Tamils. What are their respective positions on the national question ? No difference whatsoever - they both deny recognition of the Tamils as a nation, their homeland and their right to self determination; what they mean by a "common or bipartisan approach" is to seek a solution that guarantees Sinhala chauvinist domination over the Tamils.

Govt Unveils Draft New Constitution

The government of Sri Lanka on 26 March released the draft substantial sections of the proposed new constitution. The new constitution, still being debated by a parliamentary select committee, would be proposed to the house within the next couple of months, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister G L Peiris told a news conference.

"This reflects the results of the work done by the select committee during the past 15 months," Peiris said adding that the 18 chapters of the draft new constitution which were being released did not include the chapter on devolution of power to the regions was still under debate by the select committee and was being held back.

The new constitution proposes to abolish executive presidency and a return to Westminster-style parliamentary system and to make Sri Lanka a more federal state. "Another aspect of making democratic government of immediate benefit to the people is the initiative to devolve power to the proposed regional councils," a synopsis of the constitution said. "This empowerment of people at the periphery will enable them to make decisions on issues directly relevant to them without reference to a central authority," the synopsis added.

On proposed regional councils, it said constraints placed on the provincial councils established in 1987 have been removed. They have been made fully competent within the devolved sphere. The central government would have the power to take immediate measures, including the dissolution of a council, if any attempt was made by a regional council to secede or sever itself from the rest of Sri Lanka, it said.

Peiris said the recent victory for the ruling People's Alliance at the local council elections strengthened the government's hand at taking the peace process forward. Sri Lanka's constitutional reforms are expected to include devolution proposals aimed at granting more autonomy to minorities and ending the war in the island's north and east.

The new constitution also introduces a number of new rights guaranteeing protection for human rights and other freedoms. If approved by a two-thirds majority in parliament, the new constitution will be put to the people in a national referendum.

The release of the draft constitution has resulted in provoking a controversy with the other political parties. The main opposition UNP, strongly objected to Minister Pieris' move, saying that it is wrong to release them to the press while deliberations on the draft constitution are still on at the Parliamentary Select Committee. The UNP's position is that professor Pieris has violated the provisions of the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. The UNP leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe, has also contradicted professor Pieris' claim that the draft chapters have received the consensus of the parties at the select Committee.

Meanwhile, sources of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, a partner of the PA coalition, also indicated that the SLMC was not consulted before the release of the draft constitution chapters. "We were taken by surprise," remarked an SLMC MP when asked whether his party knew about the government decision to make public the draft proposals that were under discussion at the Parliamentary select Committee.

Political analysts, however, say that the government may have taken a calculated risk by releasing to the public the draft chapters of the constitution. "It is a show of government's new strength as against a weakened UNP. The government probably wanted to celebrate the local election victory by demonstrating something positive to the electorate," commented an analyst with access to the thinking of the PA leadership.

Local Poll Result Point to Support for Peace

The ruling Peoples Alliance's sweeping win in the recently held local elections has been seen by many commentators as an endorsement of the government's peace process through the devolution proposals.

"Over the past two and a half years, the government has gone to the grassroots with its peace message, and it seems that the grassroots have accepted that message," said a Tamil political analyst.

Analysts said the poll results showed huge support for the PA in rural areas, indicating that a large percentage of the population favoured the government and its peace plan to end the ethnic conflict.

"Rural voters seem to have grown up. They no longer vote with their stomachs. They are looking at the vote as a means of achieving long-term goals," the Tamil political analyst said.

"One can safely draw the conclusion that, by and large, the (majority) Sinhalese people are in favour of a political settlement," said Murugesu Sivasithamparam, president of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).

"During the poll, while the PA actively campaigned for the peace package, no one in the UNP spoke against it," he said. "So the PA's victory and the UNP's stand (on the peace plan) shows that by and large, the Sinhalese people support a political settlement of the ethnic problem."

The complete rout of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna(MEP), which stood at the election on a platform of total opposition to the government's peace proposals, was also evidence of the people's rejection of extremist politics.

Election In Jaffna ?

Following the victory of the ruling party in last month's local elections in the south of Sri Lanka, there is strong speculation that the government may hold elections in the northern Jaffna peninsula which remained for years the stronghold of the Tamil Tigers until government forces recaptured it at the beginning of last year.

"There is a strong possibility that elections (for local bodies) will be held in Jaffna," said a senior government official.

Elections were not held in the war-torn Tamil dominated north and east following representations from Tamil political parties which told the government conditions these areas were not conducive for a free and fair poll.

"It is only fair we give the choice of the vote to people of the north and the east, just as we did to people of the rest of the country," the government official said adding that an election would be a good way to bring the people of these areas into mainstream politics and that holding elections in the Jaffna peninsula, if not in the entire Northeast was a distinct possibility. None of the local bodies in the district are currently functioning.

But a Tamil group, which has already set up an office and started to function said it would lobby the government for more time if it decides to go ahead with local polls there. "The situation immediately is not conducive for a free and fair poll," said Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party.

"More than street lights and garbage

collection, the people of Jaffna need peace and an honourable settlement to this war. Neither we, nor the government, can offer them that right now," Devananda told the press. "The government has made no concrete moves yet with the peace plan and we have nothing to go to the people with," Devananda added.

If election is held in Jaffna, the LTTE is bound to oppose and disrupt it and call upon the voters to boycott it. A spokesman for the LTTE in London said on 1 April that, "Calling for elections in the army-occupied areas of the north and east is a gimmick by the government to mislead the donor countries into thinking that normalcy has returned to Jaffna. How can you hold a free election when the armed forces are intimidating the local Tamil population ? Any election held under these conditions cannot reflect the democratic wishes of the people."

Human Rights Commission Formed

Sri Lanka has set up a permanent national Human Rights Commission with broad monitoring and investigative powers. Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L.Peiris said that the five-member body would replace the existing Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) to rectify inadequacies in the existing human rights machinery.

"The setting up of the Human Rights Commission is an historic occasion. The protection of human rights is one of the most fundamental concerns of our government," the Minister said adding that the Commission will try to settle disputes before they go to court, advise the government on flaws in existing human rights protection laws and raise community awareness of rights issues and supervise conditions of those in detention.

Peiris said the composition of the Commission would be a bipartisan exercise and reflect the country's ethnic balance. "The composition of the Commission will not be the sole prerogative of the government," he said. "We readily accepted an opposition suggestion that we should consult the Leader of the Opposition when members of the Commission are appointed. We also want minority groups to be represented in the commission."

Gerard Peytrignet, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Sri Lanka, said he hoped the new organisation would help improve the human rights situation in the island which has over the years been the subject of severe criticism by local and international human rights bodies.

"The fact that we are present in the country shows the need for strengthening human rights protection," Peytrignet said.

The following are the members of the Human Rights Commission: Retired Supreme Court Justice, O. S. M. Seneviratne, heads the Commission. The other members are A. T. Ariyaratne, Professor Arjuna Aluvihare, former Justice T. Suntheralingam and Javed Yusuf. A brief resume of each member of the HRC is as follows:

O. S. M. Seneviratne: Retired judge of the Supreme Court. Justice Seneviratne, after retirement, headed a number of investigative commissions and at present heads the Commission to investigate malpractices in Sri Lanka's universities.

A. T. Ariyaratne: Leader of one of Sri Lanka's largest Non Governmental Organizations, the Sarvodaya Movement, and winner of the Gandhi Peace Prize in 1996.

Professor Aluvihare: Professor of Surgery at University of Peradeniya. He previously held positions of the Vice- Chancellor of Peradeniya University and Chairman, University Grants Commission.

Justice T. Suntheralingam: Retired High Court Judge and Chairman of the Presidential Commission investigating Disappearances in the Central and Uva Provinces.

Javed Yusuf: Presently Sri Lanka's ambassador to Saudi Arabia. A leading human rights lawyer, he was briefly a member of the National Advisory Group of the Human Rights Task Force and the Civil Rights Movement.

The law to set up the HRC was passed last July in Sri Lanka's Parliament unanimously. The delay in setting up of the Commission had earlier been highlighted by the Amnesty International. The law provides that the Commission members be appointed by the President, on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. Since, the Constitutional Council is not yet in operation, the President had consulted the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition in naming the Commission members.

Following news reports that the Commission would replace the Human Rights Task Force, some members of the Advisory Council of the HRTF have recommended that it be absorbed into the Commission to continue looking into the problems of detainees under the PTA and Emergency Regulations. Their primary concern was that the creation of the Commission does not permit the loss of expertise gained by the HRTF in the course of its activities over the past years.

Violence Against Women and Human Rights

Women who try to live and work beyond the watchful gaze of their family or community risk becoming a target for male violence, concluded a U.N. special report on violence against women, presented by Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. If the sexual behaviour of a woman is considered inappropriate compared with the community norms, she can be punished. The punishment can range from expulsion from the community to floggings, stonings, and even death.

The study by the Sri Lankan expert, presented on 4 April to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, concentrated on violence against women in the community.

The community is two-faced in relation to the human rights of women, as they are denied certain rights within it, and others outside. Both the structures of ethnic and religious communities, and the social institution of matrimony, discrimination in work and education, and sexual harassment in public places, can form part of the brutality, violence and discrimination against women.

Meanwhile, the community often provides a framework which offers women support and social solidarity, especially when state compensation is involved.

Coomaraswamy report looked into the case of women who try to improve their economic capacity by working outside the domestic or immediate community spheres, as in the free trade zones or other areas which make intensive use of poorly-qualified workers. This category of women tend to be considered as sexually promiscuous by men, and therefore, sexually available, she said. The sexual harassment of female workers is common in these zones, both in travelling to and from work, and within the workplace itself.

The report accepted that for the majority of women, the community provided the framework for the enjoyment of a social space. However, it can also be an ambit which determines the restrictions on female sexuality and its regulation. In many cases, the girls and women are victims of violence in their communities as a result of their sexuality or sexual behaviour.

The community also includes the civil society organisations which were the first to combat violence against women and discrimination, both from the state and other groups. It also tends to provide the regulating elements which offer support and safety to female victims of violence in their moments of crisis. The community is also where groups work to help women confront and protest about degrading or discriminating practices, by raising consciousness and mobilising this

sector.

The report, while also covering the international situation of rape and sexual violence against women, including harassment, violence against migratory workers, and religious extremism, called upon UN member-states to adopt institutionalised measures providing for the respect for women's rights.

"Disappearances" at New High

The level of "disappearances" in Sri Lanka has hit a new high, Amnesty International warned as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights examined the country's human rights record.

Coinciding with the Sri Lankan Government's pledge at the Commission that "full rigours of the law will be brought to bear" on the perpetrators of human rights violations, Amnesty International submitted more than 400 cases of "disappearances" to President Chandrika Kumaratunga asking her to bring those responsible to justice.

Since the security forces regained control over the Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka between late 1995 and early 1996, the total number of "disappearances" reported to the organisation has reached 648 - the highest number since 1990.

"That more than 600 'disappearances' can occur in one year despite the government's claim that it is addressing the problem is outrageous. This highlights the need for action to be taken now - to prevent these violations from continuing," Amnesty International said.

There is a clear pattern of the security forces resorting to "disappearances" in reprisal for attacks on the security forces by members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In one incident which occurred on 19 July 1996, the day after the LTTE attacked the Mullaitivu army camp, at least 40 young men "disappeared" after they were rounded up by army personnel in Kaithady, and surrounding villages in the Thennamarachchi Division. They were allegedly taken to Navatkuli army camp but when relatives went to make inquiries, they were not given any information. Amnesty International fears that they may have been massacred.

Others "disappeared" after they were taken into custody during round-up operations. One case reported was from Ayam Madduvil North, Chavakachcheri on 19 April 1996. On that day, the army took away dozens of young men who were among scores of civilians who had taken refuge at Madduvil Amman temple, as instructed by the security forces at the start of the military operation code-named "Riviresa 2." At least 20 of them have never been seen since by their relatives.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (UNWGEID) reports that in 1990 it received 4,774 complaints from Sri Lanka. By 1991, this figure had gone down to 410 and had further declined since. During 1995, 36 cases had been reported. Even at this level, this represents one of the highest rates in the world.

"The situation is reminiscent of the mid-1980s," Amnesty International said. "Between 1983 and mid-1987, we recorded 860 'disappearances' in the area, nearly all of whom are still unaccounted for. Now we have 600 in one year."

Amnesty International is calling on the president to allow international and national observers, including the UNWGEID, to visit Jaffna and assist the government in enforcing measures to bring an end to "disappearances".

"While the government has taken some measures to bring an end to 'disappearances', torture and other human rights violations, there is obviously a need for more vigorous action," Amnesty International said.

"The government should start by amending the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Regulations which provide a context for these violations to occur. And it should come down heavily on members of the security forces responsible for such actions."

Anti-Govt Demonstration in Geneva

A high-profile well organised demonstration against the actions of the government of Sri Lanka organised by the "Swiss Federation of Tamil Associations" attended by many thousands was held on 17 March in Geneva, Switzerland to coincide with sessions of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

The overwhelming majority of the participants in the demonstration were Tamils residing in Switzerland and other adjoining European countries who travelled to Geneva for the occasion in specially arranged coaches and trains. The demonstrators carried card-board cut-outs of the picture of the Tamil Tiger leader V.Pirabakaran and placards and banners proclaiming their support and allegiance to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and shouting slogans demanding that the LTTE be recognised by the international community as the representative of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Those who participated and addressed the gathering at the end of the march included Kumar Ponnambalam, the leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and Rev.Fr. Emanuel, the former Catholic Vicar General of Jaffna.

A press release issued following the event by the Federation said, "The demonstration march organised by the Swiss Federation of Tamil Associations on 17 March in Geneva highlighted the genocidal attack launched by Sri Lanka on the Tamil people.

"Amongst the panellists at a well attended press conference before the march, were Ms.A.Frankhauser, Member of the Swiss National Parliament and Committee Member of the Socialist Party, Kumar Ponnambalam, General Secretary of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, Rev. Father D.J. Emanuel, and Ms.Diedri Macdonald, Human Rights Activist.

"Ms.Frankhauser expressed her solidarity with the Tamil struggle for freedom. She said the actions taken by the Swiss authorities against Nadarajah Muralidharan, the LTTE representative in Switzerland, were a violation of international human rights. In answer to a question about the allegation that Tamils in Switzerland were being 'forced' to contribute funds to the LTTE she replied: 'This is a general charge made against freedom struggles by those who are opposed to them. The truth is that the allegation against the LTTE is without any foundation.'

"Mr.Kumar Ponnambalam said that Tamil youths were being arbitrarily and illegally arrested and gave several specific instances. He added: 'That the Sri Lanka government is motivated by malafides and has therefore much to hide from the outside world is shown by the prohibition on media personnel to North-East - except, of course, on conducted tours.'

"Rev.Father Emanuel said that he belonged to no political party but he was both a victim of and a witness to the genocidal attack launched by Sri Lanka on the Tamil people. He recounted the church bombings and the exodus of thousands of Tamils from their homes that he had witnessed. He said that the oppression of the Tamil people by successive Sinhala governments had started long before the birth of the LTTE. 'The Liberation Tigers and the armed resistance of the Tamil people were the result of decades of oppressive rule. The LTTE was not the cause of Sinhala oppression. It was the result.'

"Ms.Diedri McDonald said that foreign aid to Sri Lanka feeds the genocidal war against the Tamil people. Sri Lanka's outside propaganda was very different to the harsh internal reality of military suppression in the Tamil homeland. 'Sri Lanka's prohibition and restrictions on the media go far beyond any reasonable demands of national security - they help to hide the rape, torture and extrajudicial killings from the public gaze'.

"An estimated eight to ten thousand Tamils and supporters of the Tamil Eelam struggle marched from the centre of Geneva through crowded streets to the United Nations Headquarters at the Place de la Nations. The slogans and placards [illegible]uded the following: UN: Condemn Sri

Lanka's Genocidal War on Tamils, Sri Lanka Army: Quit Tamil Homeland, and Foreign Aid to Sri Lanka Feeds war against Tamils. The march ended with a rally before the United Nations. The rally was addressed by Nadarajah Muralidharan, LTTE representative in Switzerland, Mr.Kumar Ponnambalam, and by delegates from Denmark, Germany and London, amongst others."

NGO Statement

As many as 53 Non-Governmental Organisations, including the International Commission of Jurists, the World Council of Churches, the International Human Rights Law Group, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, International Federation of Journalists, he Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana and the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, in a joint statement called on both parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka to secure a political solution to the conflict which recognises the right of the Tamil people to determine their political status and the need to ensure full human rights of all persons in Sri Lanka.

The joint statement said, " We are gravely concerned by the continued armed conflict, the violations of humanitarian law and human rights in the island of Sri Lanka and the new military offensive in the Tamil Homeland.

"Long ago in its resolution 1983/16 the Sub-Commission expressed deep concern over the communal violence in the island. Three years later, the Commission, in its resolution 1987 61 called upon the parties to the conflict 'to respect fully the universally accepted rules of humanitarian law' and appealed at the government of Sri Lanka to allow humanitarian activities.

"14 years have elapsed since the first resolution but the violations of humanitarian law and of human rights in Sri Lanka - Tamil Eelam war are worse than ever before. We note in particular that:

1. the civilian Tamil population continues to be a target of military operations, including intensive aerial bombardment, by the Sri Lankan forces: disappearances, extra-judicial killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention;

2. the North-East of the island is still under an embargo of essential food and medicine in violation of humanitarian law;

3. there are more than 825,000 displaced Tamil civilians living under appalling conditions which include acute shortages of water, food and medicine."

The joint statement added that they "consider it imperative that the Tamil people chose their own political and national status to end the Sri Lanka-Tamil Eelam war and to provide meaningful international support to secure the aspirations of the Tamil people we urge the Commission to adopt a resolution calling upon the Government of Sri Lanka to cease all military operations against the Tamil civilian population", and "to withdraw the occupying forces from the Tamil Homeland, to lift the economic blockade in the North and East, and to allow humanitarian aid."

Soldiers Charged for Murder

Eight Sri Lankan soldiers are facing trial before a court on charges of the murder of 25 Tamil civilians, including women and children, in eastern Trincomalee a year ago. The soldiers are also charged with the attempted murder of 26 civilians who were wounded when the troops went on the rampage in the village of Kumarapuram on February 11, 1996.

Official sources said that the soldiers had apparently shot dead the civilians in retaliation for the killing of two soldiers by the Tamil Tigers near Kumarapuram, south of Trincomalee, the same day. The government, which is seeking to crack down on human rights abuses by its security forces, ordered an inquiry into the massacre after complaints by human rights groups and Tamil parliamentarians.

Arunasalam Paramarani, an 18-year-old girl who survived a massacre of Tamil civilians, giving evidence in a Trincomalee court on 3 April, told the Magistrate that the soldiers shot her mother dead and wounded her cousin and identified two soldiers involved in the killings.

Three other witnesses, out of 120 to be called in total, gave evidence at the hearing which was postponed until April 30.

Anura Sues for Rs.25 million

Anura Bandaranaike, the politically estranged brother of President Chandrika Kumaratunga has instituted legal proceedings alleging that his fundamental rights guaranteed under Sri Lanka's constitution been violated and is seeking 25 million rupees ($433,275) as compensation from the government for an alleged arbitrary search of his house by police last month.

Bandaranaike's house was searched on suspicion he was hiding a suspect, the UNP Member of Parliament Susantha Punchinilame, wanted by police for the killing of a ruling People's Alliance MP Nalanda Ellawala.

"The search was done with mischief and with political motivation," Bandaranaike said. "The suspect (UNP MP) could never have come into my house because this is a high security area and in the same compound where my mother (Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike) also lives." Police officers from the criminal investigations department had entered his house late on the night of February 12 without a search warrant, Bandaranaike said. His lawyers said since police had searched his house without a warrant Bandaranaike had been subjected to unequal treatment before the law which was an infringement of his constitutional rights.

Commission Finds Former Ministers and Officials Guilty

Two former ministers and three public officials have been found guilty of abuse of power by a Special Presidential Commission which also recommended the suspension of their civic rights.

The Commission comprising which has been probing in commercial deals entered into by the previous United National Party (UNP) government found ex- ministers Wijaypala Mendis and K.D.M.-Chandra Bandara misused their positions to influence decisions that cost the exchequer millions of rupees. The Commission also found R. Paskaralingam, former Secretary to the Treasury, and Ackiel Mohammed, then Secretary to the Ministry of Power and chairman of a privatisation sub-committee, guilty of using their positions to influence decisions in privatisation of a key state firm and a tender for bus chassis and bodies involving an Indian firm.

Paskaralingam left the country shortly after the People's Alliance won parliamentary elections in August 1994. The report of the Commission now goes to parliament for consideration and if the findings and recommendations are approved a vote, the individuals concerned will be stripped of their civic rights, depriving them of the right to vote and hold or stand for public office. The Attorney General can also institute criminal proceedings if he decides that there is evidence to support a prosecution.

The Commission said in its interim report published in mid-March that Mr. Bandara, who is deceased, and Mohammed were found guilty of influencing the Divestiture Committee, which was responsible for the privatisation of a plant run by a unit of the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC). The report stated that the Nylon 6 plant was sold in the early 1990s for 227.7 million rupees, which represented only one-fifth of its valued price of 1.2 billion rupees, to South Korea's Tongyng Nylon Company Ltd. The CPC had stipulated that only 60 percent of the shares be sold but Mr. Bandara got the Committee to sell 90 percent at a fraction of the valued price, resulting in the loss of millions of rupees to the government, the report added.

Two other junior officials who were

also subject to the investigation were not found guilty since they were forced to fall in line with the Minister's decision, the Commission said.

The Commission said Mendis used his position to exchange 76 acres of his own land in the north-central Anuradhapura district with a similar acreage of coconut plantation belonging to the Livestock Development Board (LDB) in Dankutowa, just outside the island's capital, Colombo. It said the exchange led to a commercial loss for the LDB as the market value of the coconut plantation was two million rupees ($34,662) and that of Mendis' farm 988,500 rupees.

The Commission said it found Paskaralingam guilty of influencing a contract to buy 1,500 bus chassis and body kits from India's Ashok Leyland Ltd (ASOK.BO) costing 43.7 million rupees ($757,365) in early 1990s. It added that Paskaralingam pushed the letter of intent for the contract to be issued to Ashok Leyland without cabinet approval.

Investigations into several other allegations in respect of other deals under the previous regime were continuing, the Commission said.

Police Claim "Prize Catch"

Police sources in Colombo claimed that a high-ranking LTTE operative belonging to its suicide squad presently in their custody has revealed information as to the exact location where over one hundred officers of the Sri Lankan security forces and those belonging to the Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) are imprisoned by the LTTE Considered as a "prize catch", the 26-year-old suspect, Anthonypillai Anton Nesarajah, also known as Major Rahu Appa, had reportedly told police that the prisoners are being held under tight security in a bunker in the Periyamadu area in the northwest Mannar district. "On the eastern side of a tank in Periamadu, proceed to a distance of four kilometres at an angle of 45 degrees and you will come across this high security bunker", Nesarajah is said to have told his investigators, adding that the prisoners are manacled and chained and the bunker in which they are held is guarded by about 20 well-armed LTTE cadres. He is also reported to have given details about the LTTE's main ammunition dump situated eight miles in an easterly direction from the Mullaitivu-Nayaru bridge in the Nedunkerny area.

According to the police, Nesarajah who has now been taken to Colombo and held in unidentified location under tight security, was first arrested in Mannar on suspicion and later interrogated in Vavuniya.

During interrogation, Nesarajah is alleged to have confessed to have been a key member of a suicide squad detailed to assassinate President Kumaratunga and the EPDP leader Douglas Devananda. He had also videotaped Temple Trees, the President's official residence, and Devananda's residence from a high-rise building in the capital Colombo and had also revealed plans to attack helicopters used to transport senior government politicians and officials.

In the meantime, according to government officials, President Kumaratunga was said to be planning to move from her heavily guarded residence, Temple Trees, situated in the heart of Colombo to a more secure location. The Temple Trees residence is protected by radar, anti-aircraft guns and bunkers. Several roads in the neighbourhood have been closed to traffic.

Soldiers Rape Women

Amnesty International, in a statement dated 17 March, has expressed deep concerned about the reported rape of Velan Rasamma and her sister, Velan Vasantha, at Mayilampaveli Colony, Batticaloa district, on 17 March 1997.

Velan Rasamma (34), a widow, and her sister, Velan Vasantha (28) were allegedly raped by four soldiers at their home in Mayilampaveli Colony, Batticaloa district, on 17 March 1997. The soldiers, from the Mayilampaveli army camp, reportedly forced their way into their home around 11pm and took the women outside. There, they raped them repeatedly.

Both women made a complaint to the local police at Eravur. A medical examination was carried out on the women at the local hospital on 19 March. A further complaint was made to the local Joint Operations Commander who promised to take action. However, to date no action appears to have been taken against the alleged perpetrators, states Amnesty International.

Amnesty International has urged the Sri Lankan government to take immediate action against the alleged perpetrators, and to provide protection to these women to ensure that the alleged perpetrators cannot put pressure on them to withdraw their complaint to the police.

Bolgoda Trial Collapses

When the case against 22 members of the STF including senior officers of the Intelligence Unit for involvement in dumping of bodies in the Bolgoda Lake was taken up in Courts on March 13, the judge commented that the relevant parties were not present in Court and that the absence of representatives of the Attorney General's Department in such a situation was an obstruction of justice. Saying that continuing with the trial in such a case was a waste of time, he added that he would not sit again in this case.

The Bolgoda case was one which had received a great deal of prominence both locally and abroad since it was a blatant situation of extra-judicial execution of those in state custody. However, ever since the case first broke in mid-1995 and STF officers were found to be involved in the matter, there have been a series of delays in the legal process. The Attorney General's Department may be unable to connect the fact that these persons were in detention in the custody of those STF officers who have been named in the case and the fact that their dead bodies turned up in Bolgoda to the satisfaction of a Court. However, there have been judicial precedents where Courts have found senior officers in charge of Units from where detainees have disappeared to be responsible for the disappearance and have imposed exemplary fines on such persons.

When the question of the collapse of the case was raised during the recently held sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission, the Sri Lankan Ambassador Bernard Gunatilleke responded that the Attorney General would be reinstating the proceedings before a Trial-at-Bar in the High Court.

Jaffna Library Rebuilding Project

The government is to spend 700 million rupees ($12 million) in rebuilding the Jaffna Public Library which was set on fire by the security forces on 1 June 1981. In addition to the building which was reduced to rubble, as many as 95,000 valuable books and documents including those regarded as a storehouse of the literature and heritage of the Tamil people were destroyed in the blaze in what was then described as an exercise in cultural incineration.

"The rebuilding of the Jaffna library is symbolic of a new peace, a new understanding and a new harmony among the people of Sri Lanka," President Kumaratunga said, in launching the project. The rebuilding of the Jaffna library would mark the beginning of a lasting bond between the people of the north and the south, President Chandrika Kumaratunga said.

In a goodwill gesture, a Reuter report datelined 10 April said that two Sinhalese students handed over to President Kumaratunga a book and a brick each, both of which would go towards the rebuilding of the Tamils' most important intellectual seat.

MSF Invited to Jaffna Hospital

The government has requested the Paris-based medical relief NGO, Medicine Sans Frontieres (MSF), which is already operating in Sri Lanka, to deploy team medical personnel in the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. Last October, the Health Ministry invited the relief agency to commence working in Jaffna, but the Defence Ministry was reluctant then to give clearance on "security grounds".

MSF's Dr.Guillemmo Bertoletti confirmed the request made by the government. One surgeon and paediatrician would be in the team that would go to Jaffna. The MSF is already active in the Point Pedro government hospital. A serious drug shortage existed in Point Pedro and medicine and other equipment worth approximately Rs.1 million had been purchased and handed over to the health authorities, according to Dr.Bertoletti.

The MSF is not permitted to transport medicine and equipment on their own. Everything purchased by the MSF has to be handed over to a certain department handling supplies and then airlifted. Dr.Bertoletti said that it would be easier if the MSF was authorised to transport in the vessel hired by the ICRC as that body is the only humanitarian agency allowed to operate a vessel between Jaffna peninsula and the south.

Navy to be Beefed-up

The navy plans to triple its strength and use more aggressive tactics in the war against the formidable naval wing of Tamil Tiger guerrillas, the Sri Lanka's navy chief said on 4 April. Admiral Cecil Tissera said the navy needed a fleet three times the size of its current 100-plus vessels to meet the threat from the Sea Tigers naval wing of the LTTE.

"Sri Lanka being an island nation, we should concentrate more on building up the navy," Tissera told reporters. The Sea Tigers have sunk several naval craft using a variety of unorthodox tactics, including underwater suicide squads.

"The development of the navy will take place in two phases - firstly, the immediate development of our fighting capability with better armament and detection equipment, and secondly, the long-term expansion of the fleet," Tissera said. According to him the navy plans to buy multi-purpose vessels to replace its fleet of Chinese Shanghai-class gunboats. "These vessels will have bigger guns for shore bombardment and be capable of meeting the LTTE threat from the air and underwater," he said.

More Dvora-class fast attack craft, shallow-draft inshore patrol craft and landing craft would be acquired, mostly through local production to save foreign exchange and generate more jobs, he said. The navy also planned to buy a high-speed hovercraft for amphibious operations and troop transport, the first of what could become a fleet of hovercraft, he said.

The government has allocated 44 billion rupees (US$754 million) for defence this year, of which the navy gets about 6.7 billion rupees. Defence spending in calendar 1997 will account for about 22 percent of total government spending.

In recent years, the navy has acquired waterjet-propelled attack craft from Israel and patrol boats from France, while China has sold an anti-submarine warfare vessel and gunboats and landing craft. The naval buildup began after the Tigers in April 1995 sank two gunboats in the eastern port of Trincomalee, the navy's biggest base, leading to the resumption war between government forces and the Tigers.

Cash Relief to Displaced Tamils Stopped

Sri Lanka authorities announced on 15 April that financial aid to Tamil refugees in northern welfare centres and began issuing food items instead in an effort to persuade them to return to their homes. "We have stopped financial aid from today because we want to encourage them to go home," said a government official. Each family used to be given 250 rupees ($4.3) and individuals 50 rupees (85 cents) a day to buy food, he said.

Most of the people were displaced by fighting between government forces and LTTE in the Wanni region last year. "More people are expected from the other side (LTTE controlled areas) in a few days," said K. Ganesh, the senior government administrator in the northern town of Vavuniya. Some 15,500 Tamils lived in government welfare centres in Vavuniya. "Many of them have been staying for up to six months. Some appear to think they can stay on and have not decided to return to their homes."

"We cannot accommodate all of them so we are trying to encourage those already in the camps to return to their homes," he added. "It is so crowded that there is hardly enough room for people to cook."

The authorities claimed in early April that about 60,000 displaced Tamils had crossed to government-controlled Vavuniya since last October from LTTE-held areas in the Wanni. It said 43,775 of the refugees had been sent to their homes in Jaffna and other parts of the north. A military statement said that almost every day several hundreds of displaced people were crossing over to government-controlled areas at Thandikulam, near Vavuniya.

Tamil Groups Go North

In the wake of non-LTTE Tamils parties like the EPDP and PLOTE setting up offices and commencing political work in the Jaffna peninsula, EPDP leader Douglas Devananda was recently named by the government as a co-Chairman of the District Co-ordinating Committee for the districts of Jaffna and Kilinochchi. The other co-Chairman is Gamini Fonseka, the Governor of the North-East Province. This Committee would have the responsibility for co-ordinating civilian administration and economic development in the northern peninsula. The DCCs are statutory bodies originally headed by Government Agents. In the districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa, A.Thangathurai and Joseph Pararajasingham of the TULF function as Chairman.

Mr. Devandanda had visited Jaffna several times recently under heavy security provided by the security forces, and in mid-March he chaired the inaugural meeting of the newly established DCC in Jaffna. On his return to Colombo, Mr.Devananda said that rehabilitation activities and the day to affairs in Jaffna were improving. He along with other Jaffna MPs belonging to non-LTTE parties had discussed a wide range of matters in connection with the rehabilitation and rebuilding of the war-ravaged peninsula. With the assistance government officials there, they had worked out an elaborate programme to be implemented in three different stages.

According to Mr.Devananda, the first stage would cover the immediate problems facing the day to day lives of the people, the second one would be an interim scheme and the third would be long term one for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Jaffna. "We are now mainly concentrating on raising the funds for the rehabilitation and development of the Jaffna peninsula. The allocations from the government as well as from foreign donors are urgently needed."

One of the main reason for the Jaffna people to draw close to the political parties now operating in Jaffna is the reported disappearance of many young persons. Parents or next of kin first go to the army camps or police stations in search of the disappeared persons, but

when they fail to get a satisfactory response they go to the offices of these political parties which are able to establish contact with and seek information from the security forces operating there.

Predictably the Tamil Tigers are opposed to these parties operating in Jaffna, or for that matter anywhere, and have denounced them as traitors and quislings of the government. A statement from the LTTE on 19 March said, "The Sri Lankan government promotes these Tamil quisling groups - PLOTE, TELO, EPRLF, EPDP and a government-backed splinter group of EROS - internationally as the "true" representatives of the Tamil people...These pro-government Tamil groups were responsible for the murders of many Tamil people though it was impossible to determine the precise number due to the secrecy with which these groups operated. They were also to blame for numerous disappearances at illegal detention centres..... It is well known that these same groups operated during the period of the IPKF presence in Tamil Eelam at which time they collaborated with the occupying army and carried out some of the worst atrocities against the Tamil people. They continue to play the same role today with the occupying Sinhala army."

War-ravaged Mannar Seeks New Life

The re-opening of a key road link in northern Sri Lanka after eight years has given a new lease of life to the people of war-ravaged Mannar, who are now busy putting their lives back in order, a Reuters report datelined 9 April said.

The report added that until February, when the military cleared the road, Mannar was isolated from the rest of the island as the highway was controlled by the LTTE. But now loaded trucks travel the road linking dusty Mannar - famous for its fish and rice - to Vavuniya, 100 km (60 miles) to the east every day. While fish and rice is sent from Mannar, trucks bring in flour, soft drinks, cement and other commodities that until recently were luxuries for the town's 30,000-odd people. There is a construction boom as people rebuild their homes.

"Unlike many other districts, Mannar used to be a highly productive district. We supplied the country with a substantial amount of its fish and rice requirement," said Velupillai Vishvalingam, a deputy government administrator of Mannar. "Now, with the road open, we are optimistic of regaining some of that stature," Vishvalingam told Reuters during a recent visit to Mannar, 240 km (150 miles) north of Colombo.

Government forces captured the highway, which is now reduced to a dirt track in many places, after a lengthy offensive, pushing the LTTE rebels to the north of the road. Signs of economic revival are strong. "As far as transport is considered, the situation has improved tremendously," said Xavier Cruez, a Catholic priest and head of the Mannar Association for Relief and Rehabilitation. "Till the road was opened, Mannar experienced severe scarcities in just about everything. Whatever that came here had to come by sea and was expensive," he said.

"We're already seeing a drop in prices and the demand for construction material, like cement and steel, is rising," said Colonel Udaya Ariyaratne, commander of Mannar's armed forces.

Vishvalingam said about 100 tonnes of fresh and dried fish left Mannar daily, bound for markets in Colombo. Nearly half of the district's expected rice production of 32,300 tonnes this year had found markets outside the district, he said.

But the army has been told to limit incoming supplies of many items, fearing they may fall into the hands of rebels who still control large areas to the north and Northeast of Mannar. "Still, there are a

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few LTTE rebels in town. They mingle with civilians and hide from us. We have to ensure that while the town gets its requirements. they don't fall into LTTE hands," Colonel Ariyaratne said.

At the Mannar hospital, the number of patients has doubled since the road opened. "A lot of people out in the villages, who earlier did not seek treatment, now have access to the hospital," said a medical worker from a Western aid agency. But the operation to clear the road has also forced about 80,000 of the district's original residents to cross over to rebel-held areas in the north. "Now we have to consider the plight of those people, too," said Father Cruez. "They have been dislodged from their homes and fields and are living as refugees."

Mystery Surrounds Missing Helicopter

A Sri Lankan helicopter gunship with two pilots and a technician on board went missing on 19 March about two hours after taking off from a northern military base, according to Defence Ministry officials. It is reported that one pilot and the technician were Russians.

Search operations carried for the missing Russian-built Mi-24 helicopter, which was believed to have gone down off the coast of northeastern Mullaitivu, have proved unsuccessful.

A Defence Ministry spokesman told press that two Mi-24s took off from the Palaly airbase in the northern Jaffna peninsula at around 10.45 a.m. heading east. At around 12.45 p.m. one was reported to have gone missing. The other helicopter landed at Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka.

Mi-24s are part of the air force's attack fleet used in the war against the LTTE. It was not known if the helicopter had been shot down by the Tigers who control large areas of the northeast where the helicopter disappeared. But the Tigers did not claim that they were responsible for the missing helicopter.

Sri Lanka's small air force has already lost six aircraft this year in operations against the Tigers. A Pucara ground attack aircraft exploded over the northeastern Polonnaruwa district on 15 March after the pilot had ejected safely.

Tamil Tigers blew up a Y-12 transport plane at the China Bay air base in Trincomalee in early March while in February an An-32 transport plane crashed while taking off from a base near Colombo, killing three servicemen and wounding 36. In January, a Kfir fighter jet crashed after the pilot had ejected after takeoff from the Katunayake base, just north of Colombo. A Y-12 with four people aboard and an unmanned drone, both on reconnaissance missions, went missing the same month.

The Struggle for a Seat in the Ship Thraki

by Chistopher Kamalendran, Trincomalee

The Finnish Captain of the ship that shuttles between Trincomalee and Kankesanthurai has not taken a single day off since Thraki, as the ship is called, began its mission in last September.

Worse is the plight of the passengers the ship carries. Among them were the displaced of Jaffna who go through tremendous hardship for months in Trinco before they get a place in the ship to go to Jaffna for which they require security clearance. Obtaining security clearance is also a difficult process, pushing the displaced into more hardship.

In KKS (Kankesanthurai) too, hundreds of people, some of who require urgent medical treatment, wait for a long time in the waiting list to get a place in the ship.

Thraki takes three days to come back to Trincomalee. Passengers lucky enough to get a place on the ship would have spent at least a month awaiting the security clearance and a place on the ship. Reserving a place on the ship is a difficult task, but life in transit refugee camps in Trincomalee is more difficult.

The Sunday Times team visited two overcrowded transit camps in the Trincomalee town. The inmates have no choice but to bear with inhuman conditions there until they get back to their homes. The two camps - the Glass factory and the camp at the Sangamitha Pilgrims Rest - house more than 2000 inmates each at any given time. Facilities available there are hardly enough for 1200 persons.

Not only refugees, but regular passengers as well are clamouring for a berth in the ship that carries only 289 passengers. But priority is given to the displaced many of whom stay in lodging houses and with friends and relatives.

Trinco Divisional Secretary, V. Velummylum says, "for a day I am receiving at least 500 displaced persons from Vavuniya. In addition I get 300 more applications from regular passengers who want to go to Jaffna. We give priority to the displaced persons."

In addition to the ship Thraki, there are two other smaller chartered vessels taking refugees and passengers between KKS and Trincomalee.

Refugee influx to Trincomalee soared after the recent Operation Edibala. More than 13,000 refugees who have arrived in Vavuniya from the uncleared areas want to get back to their homes in Jaffna. Unable to proceed further south, the only option open to them is to return to Jaffna.

Nagendran Devendran, 30, a fisherman from the northern town of Karainagar left Jaffna a year ago. While in Vavuniya, he said his parents, sister and one of his aunts died of malaria due to lack of proper medical treatment.

"It's difficult living in Vavuniya. The only place left for me is Jaffna and I am trying to get back to my native place," Devendran said adding that life in Jaffna was much better than in Vavuniya.

Eagambaranathan Sivalingam, an electric welder on his way back to Jaffna said that even if he got back to Jaffna it was not possible to start his job as there was no electricity. "But it is still better go back to Jaffna and stay there," he said.

Among those awaiting their turn to return to Jaffna are government servants, farmers, fishermen and students. All of them are determined to get back to Jaffna and try to start a new life, although they are not quite sure as to what is in store for them.

(Courtesy of Sunday Times)

No Rise in 1997 Defence Budget

Sri Lanka does not expect a rise in its defence spending this year, according to a top finance ministry official. P.B. Jayasundera, deputy secretary to the Treasury, said military spending should not top the proposed budget of 44 billion rupees ($758.6 million) for 1997.

"The 1997 budget is more a military type of budget, which has fully accommodated the military requirement," he said. "Each plane crash does not mean that we have to add something," Jayasundera said in reference to the country's air force, which has lost six aircraft during military operations this year.

Sri Lanka's defence spending in 1995 was 34 billion rupees, but rose sharply to nearly 46 billion, or about six percent of gross domestic product, last year as the war escalated. Jayasundera said the big increase was largely because previous budget forecasts had been made on the assumption that there would be no escalation in the conflict. "There was a gross underestimation in terms of events," he said.

PEACE PROCESS: TIME FOR MEANINGFUL ACTION

By Dr.S. Narapalasingam

Success in any challenging task depends on the adoption of the rightstrategy and importantly on the way its executed. This is an axiom that applies to a wide range of fields from the operation of business venturesto wars. Winning the peace is often more difficult than achieving military victories in the battle field. If the strategy is wrong, then the method of execution becomes irrelevant for success and inevitably will result in colossal losses. The worst case is when both the strategy and execution are fallacious.

National reconciliation becomes more difficult, when the civilians experience untold suffering as a result of the long duration of the war in which the methods of prosecution include blatant violations of fundamental rights, deliberate harassment of innocent civilians and the imposition of economic hardships on the entire people. Winning the hearts and minds of the people caught in the war is crucial for achieving the peace goal. If the latter is the ultimate aim, as claimed by the proponents of the strategy of 'war for peace', then there is little evidence so far to demonstrate the success of this strategy in terms of convincing the affected people. The wisdom of adopting this strategy has been questioned not only by this writer but by many others in the Tamil Times, since the resumption of hostilities between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces in April 1995.

The feeling among the Tamils in the North-East that they are living under an occupying force, which happens to comprise almost fully members of the Sinhalese community who cannot communicate with the civilians because of the language barrier, enduring all the harsh punishments of the army as retaliation for any sniper attack by the rebels is not conducive for achieving peace. It is a fact that in the mind of the ordinary soldier, the Tamils are the traditional enemies of the Sinhalese. This perception have got ingrained as a result of the racist rhetoric used by shortsighted politicians over several decades merely to win votes.

Although there has been a desirable change with regard to the attitude towards the Tamils among the new leadership that emerged in 1994, this has neither gone down to lower levels where direct dealings with the public take place nor yielded some tangible benefits to give the neglected people the hope that there will soon be a fair and just political solution to the ethnic problem. In this situation, the "war for peace" strategy has only hurled doubt in the minds of the affected people on its purpose.

Political Pulture

The alienation of the minorities is the result of the evolution of the attitude that retaining or regaining power by whatever means, however immoral or damaging to others and the country as a whole is part of the political process. There is some evidence that it is precisely this kind of attitude that has contributed to the ascendence of political violence in Sri Lanka. As Prof. S.T. Hettige, an eminent sociologist and Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo in an interview (published in the Sunday Island of March 16, 1997) has explained, that until 1977 the two parties gained ruling power alternately not by advocating seriously common policies and political ideology but by simply promising various personal benefits, such as jobs, promotions, transfers, licences for different business purposes, funds etc. to their supporters. As resources were scarce, it was impossible to fulfil such unrealistic promises, in so far as many supporters not so close to the politicians in the ruling party. When it was found that this tactic would no longer be effective to win votes for petty personal gains and to serve the personal interest of the members of the political parties and their leadership, the main political parties resorted to large scale political violence as a means of "coming to power or retaining power."

What the Professor has missed in his observations is that both parties had in the past used the minority Tamils also as a means of coming to power or retaining power. The non-implementation of ratified legislations and approved policies pronounced initially as government's commitments to eliminate the discrimination against the Tamils has been an intrinsic part of this strategy. The recent complaint to the Official Languages Commission by the TULF regarding non-compliance with the law relating to the maintenance of the elections register in the Tamil language and the failure to issue polling cards in Tamil by the Commissioner of Elections indicates that there is ample room for the Government to demonstrate its sincerity in addressing the grievances of the Tamils.

The Professor has drawn attention to an important point hitherto not highlighted by other independent political analysts, namely, "that even if it (LTTE) gains control of the north and east through democratic means, it will still not be in a position to achieve its goals. This is one reason why democracy is anathema to the LTTE." It is not unreasonable to conclude that the politicians, while claiming to uphold democratic principles have by their own immoral actions contributed to the erosion of the confidence of the masses in the democratic process. The two unsuccessful uprisings in the south can also be attributed to the frustration of the youths with the political system. There has to be radical change in the political process in Sri Lanka to assure confidence in its fairness among all communities in the different regions.

Lucien Rajakarunanayake, the veteran columnist highly respected for his realistic and forthright comments on political affairs in Sri Lanka wrote (Sunday Leader of March 16, 1997): "Between them (UNP and the SLFP) the two parties have threatened the safety and civic rights of the citizens and it is time to ask what role these parties have, if any, in a democracy. Are they in what is called the political mainstream for the people or for themselves? The answer is quite simple. Both are there for what they can get out of it. They are in politics for its spoils. For the power, privileges, contracts and other benefits they can get out of politics.

The level of violence in the recent local government elections makes it clear that the leadership of both the UNP and SLFP have no interest in an end to the violence and terror that has been bred in this country, under the cover of a democratic mask. It was surprising to read how Ranil Wickremesinghe promised to appoint a police commission to inquire into the police when they return to power. The irony of this pledge lies in that it came from the leader of the UNP who keeps accusing this government of only appointing commissions of inquiry, and doing nothing else to solve the problems of the people. Even worse, one realises that this pledge to probe the police comes from the leader and former prime minister of a party which was largely responsible for the wholesale politicisation of the police.

It was the party that gave promotions to police officers the very day after they had been guilty of human rights infringements by the supreme court."

Several citizen groups have mobilised themselves to deal with the menace of political violence. The statement issued by the Coalition against Political Violence on February 13 (published in the TT of 15, March 1997) highlighted the threat to democracy posed by renewed acts of political violence. The Peoples Association for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) in collaboration with the Movement for Free and Fair Elections (MFFE) monitored the March 21st local government elections. Reporting centres were established to report complaints of intimidation, impersonation and other forms of violence. It had over 10,000 observers at the various polling booths and in addition mobile units to monitor the elections.

The Free Media Movement (FMM) wanted the two monitoring groups to disclose early all the information they had gathered about alleged incidents of violence and malpractices to the media. According to the statistics released later by the monitors, of the 2,000 incidents of election-related violence nearly 1,000 were of a serious nature. This included seven killings. The monitors had said "another disturbing feature was the apparent police inaction in more than 90% of the cases." The PAFFREL/MFFE report condemns the political parties for not taking "any meaningful action to demonstrate unequivocally their rejection of violence." This is yet another instance of the contradiction between declaration of intent and actual performance on the ground that has become the salient feature of the country's political culture.

Self-serving politicians

Lisa Marshall, a psychologist at Glasgow's Caledonian University in a three-year research project that involved interviewing 105 long-term offenders in Scottish prisons discovered 50 of them were psychopaths. She questioned all and compared their answers to a widely used list of 20 characteristics of a psychopath (ref. the UK newspaper, "The Independent" of 4 September 1996). Interestingly these include: being selfish; callous; remorseless user of others; pathological liar; lacking in remorse; fails to accept responsibility for actions; has high sense of self-worth; has socially deviant lifestyle; needs constant stimulation; is irresponsible; has unrealistic goals; and is promiscuous. According to her, many politicians have the characteristics of psychopaths but without the criminal intent. Had she considered the behaviour of some of our politicians, she probably would have concluded differently!

The comment of Lucien Rajakarunanayake in his column in the Sunday Leader of March 9, 1997 is apt here. He had observed: "Those who seek to enter local government today, as a stepping stone to provincial councils and later to parliament, are a new breed that has made easy money by hook and by crook, but find such money giving them little acceptance in society. They seek the acceptance through politics, and in the process become the patrons of violence and thuggery." What he had failed to add was that for those accustomed to making easy money by hook and by crook, any opportunity for continuing this practice would not be missed after entering politics. The appeal to the voters made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga before the local government elections substantiates the above concern. She is reported to have said in a public rally in Kolonne: "It is also your duty to ensure that only candidates who have a clean record are elected. They should display no criminal tendencies."

Many politicians at the national level can by no means be considered as men chosen for their superior virtue, wisdom and dedication and discretion to act in the higher national interests. The very fact that politicians have thought it necessary to carry arms, in addition to those carried by the security personnel assigned to them, even when they go to their own electorates shows the extent to which politics in Sri Lanka has become militarised. The paranoia that has engulfed the Lankan society is not exclusively from the sporadic attacks on civilian targets by the Tamil rebels. The recent tragic events, unrelated to the ethnic conflict, have clearly proved that "terrorists" are present even outside the North-East.

Concerted effort needed

The Special Report No.8 of UTHR (Jaffna) released on 7th March 1997, exposes the hidden unethical way the State machinery continues to function and the failure of the Government to end the discriminatory practices of some bureaucrats, who ignore the principles of good governance to which the Government claims to be committed. The kind of warped reasoning which has deprived the legitimate rights of the minorities continues to influence their thinking. "Where it is an issue where the law appears to place the minority in an advantageous position, a grave crisis and a threat to peace are discovered and used as an argument to deprive the members of the minority of benefits." An important message conveyed in the report is that "efforts towards devolution will not be fruitful unless the State begins to take steps towards gaining the confidence of the people in the North- East." It has quite rightly stressed that " confidence building must therefore be an exercise independent of the (devolution) package. In part it involves cleaning the Augean stables that comprise the State machinery."

Although there are peace and civil rights movements in Sri Lanka, they have not bothered to "marshal their energies, coordinate their activities and bring to bear a common voice of the people." It is astonishing that those who worked so enthusiastically to put an end to political violence in Sri Lanka had remained indifferent to the abuses of the State machinery and the mistrust that permeated at an alarming rate all sections of the society. In order to have lasting peace in Sri Lanka, mutual trust must prevail between the diverse ethnic, religious and regional groups and all must have trust in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government. A drastic change in the way the state machinery functions consistent with the fundamental change in the ideology that hitherto allowed injustices to be perpetrated, both overtly and covertly, against the minorities is desperately needed in order to give credence to the peace efforts.

Lord Buddha preached to reject those doctrines which when put in practice led to loss and suffering. Those who had lost their lives and of their dear ones and/or endured untold suffering either in the north or south are mostly the poor people. To ignore the continued suffering of the innocent and impoverished people is unacceptable in a society that claims to be humane.

Apparently, there is a perception that to condemn the unethical or unjust stand of any group is likely to infuriate some section of the population and therefore it is prudent to remain passive or silent. If this attitude continues even among reasonable citizens, righteousness will remain buried and evil will prevail. The striking paradox in Sri Lanka is that while the country has a very high literacy rate and intellectuals who have received recognition nationally and some even internationally, yet very little has been done outside the political process to avert the kind of man-made disasters that have brought so much misery to the people.

There are no constitutional or other legislative constraints for the government to demonstrate its seriousness in bringing about the much needed changes vital for removing the psychosis of fear and giving hope for peace and security to the people. Practices that unlawfully penalise the minorities and which have got deeply entrenched in the State apparatus, both civil and military, as a result of their prolonged use over several decades cannot be condoned by the government,

that is committed to resolving the ethnic conflict in a just manner. Even here much could be done within the existing legal framework, while the devolution package is taken through the process of making it constitutional. Durable peace in Sri Lanka requires more than the reform of the constitution, although this is essential.

Meaningful Actions

A permanent Human Rights Commission has been set up recently under the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka Act. At the inauguration ceremony the Justice Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris is reported to have said: "Protection of human rights is one of the important pledges the People's Alliance gave the people before the 1994 August elections and the setting up of the Human Rights Commission makes that a reality." Until one sees how effectively the Commission functions in bringing to justice the violators of human rights in Sri Lanka, regardless of their positions in the government and society, it is premature to conclude that the pledge has been fulfilled. However, there is some hope for improvement on this front judging from two separate developments taking place in Sri Lanka.

Amidst growing concern at incidents of rape and harassment in the North-East, the ICRC in Colombo has initiated a programme that will emphasize the need for compassion and discipline among the government forces. The "law of war" is now being taught in depth. This should have been done years ago. The judges are also getting firm on human rights violators. While welcoming such positive steps, it must be stated that these only touch the tip of the iceberg. Given the complex nature of the problem, great deal remains to be done both within and outside the political process. The vivid description in the latest special report of UTHR (Jaffna) relating to the happenings in Trincomalee and which have contributed to the mistrust and fear among different communities there, gives an idea of the priorities that need to be established for achieving lasting peace.

It is stated: "Trincomalee is an area where the damage and discriminatory practices of state structures are most deeply entrenched, and have shown no change for the better under the present Government. It would serve the cause of peace well if the Government would make an effort to understand the situation and make Trincomalee a model of how different communities can realise their common interest of harmonious co-existence."

In an exclusive interview published in the March 1997 issue of "Business Today", Foreign Minister Mr.L.Kadirgamar has reiterated the present government's total commitment to the devolution proposals. He emphasized: "we will not be deterred by adverse propaganda, we will not be deterred by threats, we are definitely going to put these proposals to parliament, and in fact when necessary to the people." Such declarations no matter how often they are repeated will not give confidence and hope to the people, who continue to suffer physically and mentally without any sign of some relief. President herself has been in the forefront explaining to the Sinhalese people the urgency for a political solution to the ethnic problem through the devolution of powers. The Tamil people desperately need in the interim some tangible relief that alleviates their suffering.

The ruling People's Alliance landslide victory in the March 21st local government elections has strengthened President Kumaratunga's hands to steer the country out of the crisis situation with confidence. During the election campaign the PA reiterated its commitment to:- the peace plan, restoration of human rights, democracy, eradication of bribery and corruption and uplift the living conditions of the people. The MEP which virulently attacked the devolution package was badly defeated at this election too. There cannot be any valid grounds for any mainstream political party to obstruct the government from giving the people what they have been yearning for so long to live in peace without the fear of being terrorised by groups within and outside the government.

The Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris told a news conference on March 26, the day 18 chapters of the draft constitution were released (but not the key chapter on devolution of powers to the regions) that "the recent election victory for the ruling People's Alliance has strengthened the government's hand at taking the peace process forward." The general secretary of the main opposition party (the UNP) in a statement issued on March 29 has said: "Members of the select committee have only agreed on some issues so far. There are issues which they have disagreed on and issues which still have not been discussed." Some opposition MPs have disapproved the publication of some parts of the constitution, while the Parliamentary Select Committee proceedings are continuing. The UNP's uncompromising stand on the unitary state and the "indissoluble union of regions" in chapter 1 just released seems to be not reconciled.

The statement issued by the Foreign Minister on April 3rd, on behalf of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe on their acceptance of a common (bipartisan) approach to the ethnic conflict is very encouraging. Under an accord brokered by the British Government, the ruling PA and the UNP have agreed to work together to end the ethnic conflict through negotiations with the Tamils. The two leaders have exchanged letters in which they "agreed that the head of the government would seek the opinion of opposition leaders on significant developments relating to the ethnic conflict, regardless of the party in power." They have also "agreed that the party in opposition should not undermine any discussions or decisions between the ruling party and any other group, including the LTTE rebels, aimed at ending the conflict." Despite this encouraging development, no one can predict with any certainty how long it will take for the present constitution to be amended and in what form it will emerge. Even from the language used in the agreement, it is clear that a permanent solution is not near. This only signals the ground-breaking step in the peace process,

The Government should seize this mood of the opposition and act immediately on hitherto neglected matters that could help to take the peace process forward. As mentioned earlier, these do not require either constitutional reform or new legislations. What is needed is the will to act. Any hesitation in addressing the basic issues related to the Tamil problem will only help the extremists to sabotage the peace effort. This lesson has been learnt at great cost. The "war for peace" strategy must give way to an effective strategy for peace without war. Sri Lankans should not be deprived this time too the peace that they have been waiting for since 1994 and which they deserve to have after their harrowing experiences with the protracted war. ●

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LOCAL POLLS IN RETROSPECT

By D B S Jeyaraj

The recently conducted polls to 238 local authorities in seven provinces other than the Tamil dominated North-East has been concluded. The ruling Peoples Alliance has won 194 of these comprising 7 Municipal councils, urban councils and 167 Pradeshiya Sabhas (units based on Assistant Government Agent divisions).

The Chief Opposition Party, the United National Party has won 5 municipal councils, 11 urban councils and 27 Pradeshiya Sabhas. An Independent group has won a solitary victory in remote Angulanpelessa of the Southern Province.

Compared to the 1991 position where the then ruling UNP had captured 193 local authorities the PA performance this year was almost a complete turnaround. In simplistic percentage terms the PA victory amounts to 81% of the total contested.

The elections themselves were conducted in an atmosphere of violence, terror and intimidation. The centre for monitoring election violence reported that 731 incidents of violence have been recorded in 30 police divisions covering all areas where elections were scheduled from 5 March to 5 April.

The impressive performance of the PA underscores another norm gaining acceptance in recent times. In Sri Lanka there has been a tendency for people to support the Party in Government during local authority elections. This tendency has been further reinforced by the unabashed use of all State apparatus at it's disposal by the governing party or parties in power in the course of the campaign. The UNP did it earlier and the PA is accused of it now.

In a statement that indicated clearly a change of roles Opposition Leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe charged the PA with large scale impersonation and vote rigging. The UNP also alleged that the PA did comparatively well in areas where large scale violence prevailed. Independent observers did witness several incidents where UNP polling agents were terrorised and chased off from polling booths and counting stations.

It must be noted that these election campaigns were conducted by both parties with an intensity that was not usually seen in local authority polls. The mood was like a General or Presidential Election where the power stakes are naturally high. This was the main reason for the massive violence this time. Notwithstanding this spectre of violence the PA performance has been hailed by the Colombo media as a resounding victory.

Looking at the polls from a headcount perspective will certainly convey that impression. The PA got 194 or 81% out of 238 local authorities; it won 167 or 86% out of 195 Pradeshiya sabhas; 20 or 65% out of 31 Urban councils; 7 or 59% out of 12 Municipal councils.

Another way of looking at it would be on the basis of votes garnered. 7,522,477 votes were registered. This was 77.2% of the total votes. The usual voting average for local polls has been generally around 65%. This high rate of polling has been adduced in favour of the UNP argument about vote rigging.

The Government obtained 3,418,205 votes amounting to 48.97%; The UNP with 2,879,759 got 41.25%; These percentages were compared and contrasted with the 1994 August election results to show that the PA continued to retain it's voter base while the UNP had seen a drop. In August the PA got 48.94% while the UNP had 44.04%.

Constitutional Affairs Minister Professor G L Peiris went a step further when he pointed out that the votes gained by the PA backed Independent group in Colombo as well as those of it's constituent partners the Ceylon Workers Congress and Upcountry Peoples Front should also be added on to the PA Votes. By this logic the PA percentage went up to 50.9% of votes polled.

A direct comparison with the 94 General election results may not be appropriate or accurate for two reasons. Firstly local authority elections have not been held in the North-East as in 94; Elections were held only in 17 districts of the South. Secondly there was a drop of 372,893 votes in the present polls as compared to 94 Aug polls.

Comparing the present voting pattern with Aug 94 on the basis of the relevant 17 districts alone provides a different insight. The PA got 3,784,926 in the 17 districts; This is devoid of CWC and UPF votes; The PA percentage was 51.47%. So the PA performance in 94 was better in the 17 districts. Likewise the UNP which got 3,353,532 in August 94 has less now.

In that context the better comparison would be with the Presidential polls of November 1994 where Chandrika Kumaratunge scored heavily with 62%; The Presidential elections of November 94 saw 6,997,398 votes being polled in the 17 districts in question. The PA gained 4,267,725 votes while the UNP got 2,608,675 votes. Against that result the PA this time has lost 708,458 votes while the UNP has registered a gain of 271,084 votes.

The overwhelming victory of Chandrika Kumaratunge in the Presidential stakes was due mainly to the massive support of the minorities. Since there were no elections to the North-East it could be surmised that the PA percentage on a national scale would be much higher than at present with Tamil and Muslim support

But then again the most significant aspect of the current local polls was the resurgence of support for the UNP among the minority communities notably the Tamils, The traditional minority vote bank which went over to the PA in 94 has seemingly returned to the UNP this year.

In Colombo the PA backed Independents list led by former UNP Mayor Ganeshalingam who did a political long jump. polled only about 90,000 votes while the UNP led by a relative newcomer Karu Jayasuriya got 120,000. This was in spite of an explicit assurance that Ganeshalingam would become Mayor again by the powers that be. Ganeshalingam's personal votes were much lower than expected while only one out of 7 CWC nominees got elected, A clear indication that Tamils had either voted for the UNP or opted not to vote for PA.

This was the case in almost all areas in the up-country where sizable concentrations of Tamils are prevalent. The CWC contested five councils on it's symbol of cockerel. The UPF also contested separately as Independents in some. In other PA lists CWC candidates were accommodated, Thondaman's reputation as a Kingmaker who could deliver a bloc vote was seriously damaged when results were announced, The CWC was not able to win any council on it's own; In the Wattala-Mabola areas the CWC performance was abysmal. Likewise the UPF;CWC candidates on other PA lists also did not fare well. The unkindest cut of all was that large number of Tamils had voted for the UNP which they had spurned in 1994.

In the case of the Muslim community the swing against the PA was not that severe. Again this was more due to the Muslim Congress and the individual mer-

its of some candidates rather than an index of support for the PA alone. The Muslim Congress which fielded only one candidate alone in areas where Muslims were concentrated campaigned that all 3 votes should be cast for their nominee alone. This was a device by the Muslim Congress to test the waters and gauge support for a future bid of contesting alone.

28 Muslim Congress Candidates were elected in all with several topping the lists. The running battle between Ministers Ashroff of the Muslim Congress and Fowxie of the SLFP saw the former winning the round in Colombo. Ashroff's nominee Azoor came second in the list ahead of Fowzie's own son who had been blatantly promoted by the Father.

The reasons for the Tamil vote bank returning to the UNP are quite complex and deserves a more detailed analysis that could be the subject of another article. At the risk of over-simplification it could be said that Chandrika's strategy of "Peace through War" has in practice caused tremendous misery to the Tamil people. The predicament of the People in the traditional Tamil homeland is vicariously experienced by Tamils living in Colombo and the South too.

Moreover the Tamils living in Colombo and in the South have been continuously subjected to humiliating hardship in the name of security. Their basic human rights have beeb violated callously time and again by Security officials. All this has resulted in Tamil opinion shifting away from Chandrika in the past year. She herself did not seem to realise that her image among the Tamils was now a moon on the wane. Many Tamils in Colombo have become quite hostile and expecting them to vote for a renegade UNPer of Cyril Mathew vintage merely because he bore a Tamil name was too much to expect. In the case of the upcountry Tamil they too share along with their SriLankan Tamil counterparts a common vulnerability to the excesses of the security forces who see a tiger behind every tea bush. Apart from this are the particular problems facing them ranging from housing to education. There is rising cost of living without real wages showing a corresponding substantial increase. Also there are problems compounded by privatisation. Despite the Plantation Patriarch Thondaman and the messiah of the intelligentsia Chandrasekeran being Minister and State Minister nothing tangible has been achieved.

The Tamil voting trend indicates that the minorities in the South have very real problems including the fallout from the War for Peace. The groundswell of resentment cannot be contained by the promise of an overall political package alone. The glimmer of the pot of gold at the rainbow end is fading away. Existential realities become painfully important. The harassment undergone by Sri Lankan Tamils in the name of security measures has to be remedied. Up Country Tamils have particularly genuine problems that have to be addressed effectively. Doling out political patronage alone is no answer.

The election results also have some positive lessons for the UNP leader Rani Wickremesinghe This is the first major election campaign he has led from opposition ranks. Possibly his biggest achievement in this election could be the wooing of the minority vote bank away from the PA. Although the UNP has not pledged full support for the proposed political package it has at the same time not whipped up a chauvinist campaign against it too. This is quite contrary to earlier experiences where parties in the opposition have been quick to oppose any measure contemplated by the government in power on the ethnic question.

Ranil however has curbed the Chauvinists in his fold and refrained from an all out campaign against the envisaged settlement. This is appreciated greatly by Tamil opinion and is a contributory factor to the UNP's success vis a vis the Tamils at the recent polls.

At the same tine he has been cautious in not extending support to some principles such as transforming the unitary state into a union of regions. If on the other hand the UNP asserts itself more positively in favour of Tamil rights then it could possibly perform even better. Memories are short in politics and no entity has a political monopoly of a vote bank for ever and ever, political strength itself is an ephemeral phenomenon. The UNP could be the champion of the minorities again if it plays it's cards correctly. Besides what many people do not realise is that if and when the ethnic problem is settled current political equations would undergo a drastic transformation with Tamils opting to join or support parties on a national level.

The recent agreement between President Kumaratunge and Opposition leader Wickremesinghe regarding the adoption of a bi-partisan approach towards the ethnic problem has proffered Ranil a golden opportunity. Already by signing the accord Ranil has demonstrated to his Tamil constituency in particular and the world at large that he will not stand in the way of an amicable settlement. What is now required of him is greater involvement and participation in the peace efforts whereby he could share equally along with Chandrika any credit that would accrue as a result of a satisfactory solution. A bi-partisan approach on the modalities is meaningless without a bi-partisan consensus on the fundamentals.

The local polls in the initial stages were projected as a substitute referendum. The PA has been dismayed by the absence of a definite commitment by the UNP towards the Constitutional reform process. Apart from a consensus at the Parliamentary select committee level, amending entrenched clauses require a two-thirds majority in Parliament and consequent ratification at a referendum. This made UNP co-operation vital. In the context of perceived UNP non co-operation the PA was toying with a new option described as a "constitutional revolution".

The idea was to conduct a non-binding referendum on the envisaged political package. The ensuing campaign would compel the UNP to adopt a definite position on the issue. The possible loss of support among the minorities as well as the prospect of losing supportive international opinion would make the UNP hesitant in opposing it vigorously. Given the success displayed in the 94 Presidential polls and the new voting bloc available in the North the PA would cruise through smoothly with a thumping majority at the referendum. Thereafter the UNP could be persuaded to co-operate with the process that had been endorsed by the country at large or threatened with a snap election which would in the wake of a successful non-binding referendum provide the PA with a two-thirds majority. This was the original strategy.

Later there was a change of tactics. It was decided to hold local authority elections and test public opinion. The goal however was a voting percentage of 55% in favour of the PA. Since the PA was supposedly stronger in rural areas the date for the polls was fixed to follow the harvest period and precede the drought season. The intensity of the campaign was caused to a certain extent by the desire for a substitute referendum.

As the campaign progressed different developments occurred and changed the originally envisaged direction of the campaign. The question of the political package became marginalised. In the first instance the UNP was careful in avoiding references to the package. The party concentrated on other issues for propaganda. Even the parties opposing the package like the JVP, MEP and the independent groups backed by Srimani Athulathmudali's DUNLF could only oppose the Package in principle as a mere abstract concept; It could not be attacked on a concrete level as the nitty gritty aspects were not made public. 18 chapters of the draft were released only after the polls.

Surprisingly the PA too did not make much use of the political package in their campaign. Only Chandrika Kumaratunge and GL Peiris referred in detail to the package. Most PA leaders also avoided speaking about it. On the contrary propaganda centred more around the military successes in the North. Four days before the polls Chandrika jolted everyone with a political gaffe reminiscent of her predecessor D B Wijeytunge when she said

(Continued on next page)

PEACE PROCESS THE NEED FOR A COMPLETE STAGE BY STAGE APPROACH TO END THE LANKAN ETHNIC CONFLICT

By V Ambalavanar*

(Contd. From last issue)

VI. STEPS NEEDED TO MOVE TOWARDS PEACE

(1) Cease-fire

One of the basic requirements of any peace process is a cease-fire. If it is brought about, Parliamentarians will have a proper environment to sit and discuss a package meant to bring about peace to the country in a calm atmosphere. It is particularly important to ensure that emotional reactions to destruction by violence does not cloud positive and objective analysis by those who are entrusted with the responsibility of doing justice to the job that they have been elected to do. The cease-fire should also be properly monitored by an independent party, preferably a foreign party acceptable to both sides. The Government, the LTTE the official opposition party and other parties and organisations should help to stop the violence that is causing so much of destruction to the people and their properties.

A second factor of crucial importance is the feedback from the people to the Select Committee's work. Here again a need for a peaceful atmosphere needs no extra emphasis. Of special relevance is the feedback from the people of the North and East and even from other areas. No solution worked out through the ongoing process could have much credibility as a solution if the people as a whole are denied the facility of studying the contents of the package and making their views known to the Select Committee.

The Tamils in particular should feel that they are free to go to possible meeting places, have discussions, and make their views known to the Select Committee without the fear of being taken into custody by law enforcement authorities on suspicion.

In this process, facilities which enable Tamils and others outside the North and East to interact with the people of the North and East are most desirable. It is therefore very necessary to revise the various security checks within and between regions to help the Select Committee process in a meaningful way. Since the Government claim that the revised legal document that is before the Select Committee will bring about peace to this country and expects everyone, especially the Tamils to make their views known, the Government should take note of these basic requirements and initiate action to create the proper environment. This is also a matter that even the Select Committee itself should insist on to ensure that all sections of the people of this country are provided adequate facilities to make representations to it. A cease-fire will be a step in the right direction.

(2) The need to win the hearts and minds of the Tamils

While a cease-fire is a first necessary step to bring about a calm atmosphere in the country, of equal importance is the provision of the basic needs to the Lakhs of people who have been displaced from their homes since 1994. These people and the Tamils elsewhere in the country who overwhelmingly voted for the present Government especially at the Presidential Elections with the hope that the Government will bring about peace, should not be identified as villains when others who live in more comfortable surroundings oppose the package of the Government and make further action difficult in the peace process. The Government should learn from the experience of Emperor Asoka and make sure that it does not fall into the same trap which the Emperor fell into, despite the correct advice of the Buddhist Clergy. There is no doubt that a vast majority of the Clergy from all our religions will not want the violence and destruction to continue and the basic needs of a section of the people neglected.

(3) Importance of re-commencement of peace talks

In the modern world, peace cannot be achieved by violent means. This has been accepted by both parties involved in the violent conflict in Sri Lanka. The earliest peace talks took place on this basis. It should also be noted that negotiations took place in 1994 and 1995 when there was no cessation of hostilities. Under the circumstances if talks without mediation are not considered helpful by the Government and the LTTE, the obvious alternative is to have talks facilitated by third party mediators. It is a healthy sign to find about 23 Members of Parliament who attended a peace conference abroad recently, advocating such an approach. This is also being suggested by peace groups, human rights organisations and the like. In a recent statement, H E the President has also suggested a similar approach.

As a friendly neighbour and as a country having close links with us in several spheres, India is the obvious first choice for third party mediation. It is expected that India's concern for the suffering people and the magnanimity of the people of India will soon help to erase any bitter memories of the recent years and pave the way for the Government of India to come in and play an active and constructive role as a mediator.

However, no third party will like to come in as a mediator if the parties involved in the conflict do not ask for such mediation. If the assistance of an International organisation or another Government is considered helpful, the initiative to get such help should be taken by the Government. Instead of continuing with the costly war, the Government should consider this option seriously, especially at a time when the mediation process could provide very useful feedback to the Select Committee. Such discussion with the help of a third party mediator should also bring the main opposition party directly into the process, thus taking it above party politics. The other parties represented in Parliament as well as the

(continued from page 18)

that there was no ethnic problem and only a terrorist problem thereby negating all need for the constitutional reform process.

After the assassination of the young Ratnapura MP Nalanda Ellawela the dimension of violence and counter violence pervaded the campaign in a big way. The question of pros and cons for the political package became irrelevant, It soon became a non-issue. Therefore it has become pointless to refer to the PA victory as a victory for peace and the political package. Neither the PA nor the UNP were stridently articulate either for or against the package in their campaign. It was not an issue for the voters with those supporting a political settlement voting for the UNP and those opposing the settlement voting for the PA.

What is necessary now is for the major Sinhala parties to set the acrimoniously bitter election campaign behind them and move positively forward to forge a bi-lateral approach and consensus towards the resolution of the ethnic question. ●

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rest of the country will have their say through the Select Committee process. In fact the talks aided by the third party mediator could also continue during the stage 2 that was referred to earlier after reaching a suitable position. It could also facilitate the active participation of the militants in the political process through the Regional Councils.

The recent reports of large number of desertions from the armed services convey the message that large numbers of persons selected for these services (between 16,000 and 18,000 according to recent reports over the media) do not like to fight the war. It is ironic to find the Government which is committed to bring about peace trying to persuade and even threaten these persons not to engage in peaceful occupations in Sri Lanka and abroad. Some reports of possible conscription have also recently appeared in sections of the media. It is not clear whether the Government is considering such an option seriously.

As the further escalation of the war itself and conscription (if true) are matters of major concern to the public, the Government should consult all sections of the people even at this late stage. An appropriate step at this juncture is a referendum to find out whether the people really want this damaging war to continue or they would rather prefer fresh efforts towards a negotiated settlement through third party mediation or facilitation. In such a negotiation process the devolution proposals of the Government amended as per suggestions in section 7, could be one of the basic documents.

(4) Resettlement, reconstruction and rehabilitation

It is well known that the North and East of the country have been seriously affected by the violence of the past thirteen and a half years. After the cease-fire, urgent matters that need attention are the resettlement of people, reconstruction and rehabilitation. While discussions on Devolution and related issues continue, the details of resettlement, reconstruction and rehabilitation should be worked out simultaneously by groups consisting of Government representatives and the local political and administrative machinery including the militant cadres in the respective areas. The participation of all these parties will be facilitated if the amnesty announced by the Government is kept open and the security of everyone is ensured. The rehabilitation should also cover the rehabilitation of human beings. In this connection we must learn from what has been happening in the world and accept the fact that today's militants could be tomorrow's protectors of the Nation. The attitude of forgetting and forgiving is of crucial importance as preached by all our religions.

VII. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC MATTERS INTHE PACKAGE

(1) Preliminary notes

Normally, when peace is attempted both parties involved in the conflict will be talking peace on the basis of a peace package. However, in our case the two parties who were already involved in a violent conflict at the time of the announcement of the package in August 1995, found themselves in a situation where the violent conflict only escalated. To date we are not aware as to whether the August package has been sent to the militants by the Government. We are also not aware of any detailed comments by the militants on the package. Even other organisations of the North-East who could have made some views known were not in a position to express views as most of them probably found themselves among the Lakhs of new refugees of the post 1994 conflict.

Under the circumstances any comments on the present Consitutional proposals should attempt to do two things:-

(a) What amendments are necessary to the August 1995 proposals to stop the violent conflicts?

(b) What amendments are needed to make the present proposals to properly reflect what were stated in the original proposals and what additions are necessary to cater to (a) above?

Besides the above it should also be recognised that the present Constitutional proposals on Devolution should best be viewed along with the overall proposals for Constitutional changes. This brings us to (c) below.

(c) What amendments are needed to all other Constitutional proposals to ensure that they are compatible with acceptable Constitutional changes on Devolution?

Any comments given in this paper on the present proposals should therefore, be viewed in the proper perspective, taking note of (a) to (c) above.

(2) Comments

(a) The words 'an indissoluble Union' should be changed to 'a Union' in line 2, section 1 of chapter 1. This Devolution Package is a legal draft of the centre. Such restrictive terminology could be considered after close consultation at Regional and Sub-Regional levels is facilitated through a feedback from Regional Councils themselves. This is particularly necessary because consultation with a substantial section of the Tamil population in the North-East has not taken place. Further, any formal attempt by the North Central Provincial Council and the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council to make representations has been precluded for some time.

(b) The entire sub-para (2), section 2 of chapter 1 should be deleted. This Sub-para is an impediment to free discussion of Devolution and Unit of Devolution by the Regional Councils which is considered necessary to provide the feed-back from the Regions in Stage 2.

(c) First Schedule - Until the Regional Councils express their views formally through the Devolution Commission and Parliament takes a final decision the Regions should be as follows:

South-West Region consisting of the Southern and the Western Provinces, excluding the Capital Territory.

Central-West Region consisting of the North-Central and North Western Provinces.

Central Region consisting of the Central, Sabaragamuwa and Uva Provinces.

North-East Region consisting of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The rationale behind this has been set out in section 3 of this paper.

(d) The entire chapter 2 should be deleted. It creates further room for divisions and separatist tendencies. The words of wisdom 'One language, two Nations or two languages, one Nation' of our experienced political leaders should be recalled here. When we are grappling with the massive problems already created on an ethnic basis, it is desirable to refrain from introducing matters that could lead to similar problems on the basis of religion.

(e) The words 'and not more than six other Ministers' in line 2, sub-para (1), section 14 of chapter 3 should be changed to read as 'and such other number of Ministers'. When the number of Ministers is specified in this manner, it does not take into consideration the needs properly. In Regional Councils where there is high workload, more Ministers may be needed. Centre should not treat the Regions as less responsible than the centre when it comes to increasing overheads by appointing more Ministers. We must remember that both the Centre and the Regions are equally answerable to the people who elect the representatives. Moreover, stipulating the number of Ministers goes against the very basics of Devolution.

(f) At the end of sub-para (5) (d), section 20 of chapter 3, a new sub-para (5) (e) should be introduced to read as '(e) the land area of the Region.' This is suggested on the basis that more resources will be needed to develop larger areas.

(g) In line 2, sub-para(1), section 21 of chapter 3, the words 'in consultation with the Governor' should be replaced by the words. 'with the concurrence of the Chief Minister'. The present wording may have been used to preserve the independence of the Regional Public Service Commission. However, the initial appointment of this Commission with the concurrence of the Chief Minister will help to select suitable officers for appointment to the Regional Councils. While the Public Serv-

ice Commission at the centre has been functioning with little independence over a long time it is meaningless to expect independence to be preserved at the Regional level. If the suggested amendment is not made it will convey an impression that from the beginning the Regional Public Service Commissions are being controlled by the centre. This will be an adverse factor against healthy devolution.

(h) At the end of sub-para (4), section 24 of chapter 3, a new sub-para (5) should be introduced to read as '(5) Any land allocations by the Centre under sub-paras (3) and (4) above shall be subject to the provisions of sub-para (2) above.' This is an important amendment. After providing for the relative priorities in land allocations in sub-para (2) the Centre should not have the flexibility to violate such priorities. If it is allowed to violate the pre-specified guidelines, the local people of the Region will feel let down.

(i) Sub-paras (3)(a), (3)(b) of section 25, chapter 37 provide for different ways in which Regional Police Commissioner, and the other members of the Regional Police Commission are to be appointed. Sub-para (b) should be changed to enable the appointment of the other two members of the Regional Police Commission by the Chief Minister in consultation with the Governor in the interest of a healthy functioning of the Regional Police Commission. Hence, the words 'Constitutional Council' in line 2. of this sub-para should be replaced by the words 'Chief Minister in consultation with the Governor'

(j) Sub-para (4), section 25 of chapter 3 conveys a wrong idea. The offences such as the ones referred to in this sub para should be viewed on the basis that the Regional Police is as concerned as the Central Police about the country's interests. Thus, this sub-para should be completely deleted.

(k) Section 26 of chapter 3 should be completely deleted and details as per section 8 of this paper should be included in section 29 of chapter 3 when it is revised as suggested in this paper.

(l) From the contents of sections 27 and 28 of chapter 3, it would appear that most of the revenue collection is in the hands of the Central Government. Although it may be explained that the Government needs large extents of financial resources to enable priority allocation of funds to the Regions that have been badly affected by violence, from a long term point of view there exists a clear need to suggest amendments. Hence, this has also been included as a subject that needs careful study before amendments are suggested. These could be referred to the Devolution Commission for special consideration.

(m) The matters referred to under section 29 of chapter 3 concerning the Chief Ministers' Conference should be deleted and provision should be made for the establishment of the Devolution Commission and the Peace Secretariat as per details in section 8 of this paper.

The above does not necessarily include all the matters that have been reckoned as matters needing amendments. It is not the intention of this paper to list all the matters that are reckoned as matters needing amendment. Only certain important matters have been included.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION

(1) Important aspects of implementation

It has been brought out in the earlier sections that the package announced by the Government is not a complete peace package. The several additional steps that are necessary to bring about peace have also been stated in those sections. Since proper implementation is of crucial importance to the success of the process, this section discusses some of the relevant issues involved in the monitoring, review, feedback and evaluation work connected with the package. In this regard it is useful to note that the monitoring, review and feedback work should be carried out on a continuing basis during formulation and implementation. This will facilitate speedy corrective action whenever problems are encountered. Evaluation is an exercise that is to be undertaken at the end of a suitable phase in the implementation when we will like to know whether all the expected benefits have been realised.

In order to do the above in a satisfactory manner, it is necessary to briefly state the present (baseline) situation. This is done in sub-section (2) below'.

(2) Present situation

At present, we have an Executive Presidency which has been widely criticised by the people as not being suitable for us. The Provincial Councils System established under the unitary framework has been recognised as not suitable to meet the aspirations of the national minorities by the present governing party. When the People's Alliance sought a mandate from the people, it promised to provide for maximum devolution, stop the war and bring about peace. However, when the dream of peace through direct talks failed to materialise the Government did not appear to have a proper plan to take the peace process forward without enhancing the intensity of the war. The devolution package came out in its original form, only four months after the cessation of hostilities agreement broke down. Seventeen months have already passed since 15 July 1995, the original deadline set for the abolition of Executive Presidency.

The losses to the country resulting from the war, including expenditures on defence, which were estimated to add up to about Rs. 100 Billion per year when the present Government came to power have shot up to about Rs 150 Billion per year since then. Likewise, the loss of life which was about 5,000 per year when the Government came into office, shot up to about 7,000 per year since then. More than six Lakhs of people from the North and East have lost their homes and become refugees. Over two Lakhs of students from those areas are struggling to continue their education in pathetic conditions under trees without adequate furniture, etc and without even necessities such as exercise books and the like. Even the schools in the rest of the country have been closing and opening without any set pattern and functioning in a very unsatisfactory manner. The latest major disruption to education has taken place in Vavuniya. Higher education in the North has almost come to a standstill. People throughout the country are living in constant fear that there may be a major attack or bomb blast.

Our country which was said to be marching towards a newly industrialised country status not so long ago seems to be going in the opposite direction. Fall of per capita income, increasing unemployment, increase in the cost of living, fall in the standards of living, etc. are being faced by the people.

The above situation can be changed, only by a truly dedicated peace effort. The counter productive nature of the war for peace strategy became evident several months ago. This strategy has only made the problem more complex. The parties concerned have been advised or urged through papers by several peace loving people and organisations to stop the war and initiate peace talks through third party mediation because of the realisation of the above. Such widespread efforts are continuing.

(3) Monitoring, review and feedback

When actions are initiated to implement the suggestion made, three groups of activities should be subject to close monitoring review and feedback process. Firstly, all the actions contemplated should be scheduled and prepared in the form of a programme, which should be subject to daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual monitoring as appropriate and adequate feedback provided to the decision makers. Secondly, the benefits and the reduced harmful activities should be identified and made known to the decision makers and the people on a continuing basis. Thirdly, there should be an alertness to possible man made disasters that could upset the peace process. These tasks should be assigned to a Peace Secretariat that would function in a responsible manner with a sense of commitment to peace. During the early stages, this Secretariat should function as an organi-

sation which is primarily designed to handle disasters.

When reference is made to man made disasters, attention needs to be given to ways and means of taking action to prevent disasters. Experts who have handled such situations elsewhere in the World will be able to advise as to how signals on impending disasters could be identified, monitored and feedback provided. There should be in position a countrywide monitoring arrangement. If disasters occur, they will create disturbances which in turn will put back the peace process. Hence there should also be in position a disaster mitigation arrangement.

It has been explained that the Peace Secretariat will be an important organisation in the performance of the above tasks. However, a Secretariat alone cannot be expected to handle the above matters adequately. There should also be in position an organisation which could provide the necessary authority and status to the Secretariat and guide its activities. Key political leaders at the Central and Regional levels and peace workers should form such an organisation. It is also desirable that the organisation functions above party politics.

Reference was made to a Devolution Commission in the package of August 1995. It is most appropriate to arrange the functioning of the Secretariat referred to above, under such a Commission as its supporting Secretariat. Thus the establishment of a Devolution Commission and the supporting Peace Secretariat is strongly suggested as an addition to the Legal Document. The Commission should be headed by the President or the Prime Minister (after the Executive Presidential System is changed). The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Chief Ministers of the Regions, Members nominated from the Parliament (same number as the number of Chief Ministers) and not more than five Peace Workers appointed by the President should be the other members of the Commission. The administrative head of the Peace Secretariat should function as the Secretary of the Commission.

New institutional arrangements created along with changes should come into existence, only in terms of the new needs. Thus, if a Devolution Commission with heavy responsibilities is set up, there is no need for a separate Chief Ministers' Council. If there is a Devolution Commission of the type suggested in the package of August 1995, it will provide an ideal opportunity to decide on all matters relating to Centre - Region conflicts through healthy consultations. The chances of witnessing the recurrence of the unfortunate experiences of some of the Provincial Councils will be considerably reduced. With these arrangements the provisions of Section 26 of Chapter 3 in the Legal Package should also be amended to provide for an initial discussion of matters relating to the need for a State of Emergency in a Region by the Devolution Commission and decisions taken in consultation with it.

The above arrangements should, in the first instance, be made through an early appointment of a Peace Commission in the manner suggested for the appointment of the Devolution Commission. A section of the Ministry of National Integration could be immediately converted into a Peace Secretariat to do necessary spadework. At an appropriate stage they could be transformed into organisations of the type described.

As regards the second chamber referred to earlier, the decision could be postponed for the second stage. The advantages and disadvantages of further institution building at the centre need careful study by the centre as well as the regions before a finality is reached on the matter.

(4) Evaluation

In order to assist in the evaluation process, the present situation has been briefly described in the previous section. The situation that emerges after the operation of one or two terms of the Regional Councils could be compared with the present situation and a projected situation that will make Sri Lanka a Newly Industrialised Country to complete an evaluation. Initial work in respect of such an evaluation will clearly bring to focus the fact that our country is lagging way behind other developing countries especially countries of the Asian region.

IX. SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

(a) This paper brings together some of the work covered in earlier papers on the Devolution Package. A different approach has been adopted to first bring the Devolution into the picture as something necessary anyway. Thus, we should bring about an attitudinal change about devolution and proceed on the basis that devolution is necessary and desirable whether or not there is an ethnic problem before us.

(b) When decisions are made concerning the units of devolution, we should create multi-ethnic units which are larger than the Provinces.

(c) Decisions about devolution are best made on the basis of a consensus between the Centre and the Regions. When viewed in this manner, the present work of the Select Committee could be reckoned as Stage 1. In Stage 2, these should be discussed at the Regional level and brought to Parliament through the Devolution Commission.

(d) In Stage 2, the Regions will get an opportunity to discuss in detail all the controversial matters and make their respective positions known. Muslims in particular will have further opportunities to get added support to their point of view.

(e) As regards the second chamber referred to earlier, the decision could be postponed for the second stage. The advantages and disadvantages of further institution building at the centre need careful study by the centre as well as the regions before a finality is reached on the matter.

(f) The costs of the war which has been going on for over thirteen and a half years have been brought to focus. We have lost over 60,000 lives, spent Billions and Billions of Rupees, destroyed Billions and Billions of Rupees worth of movable and immovable property in the process. The case of Mahabharatha has been brought in to impress upon all of us that we are going on the path of self destruction by refusing to give and take in negotiations. The case of Emperor Asoka has been mentioned to make us realise that attempts to beat anyone into submission will only be counter productive. By the quick resolution of all the problems, we will bring to an end the violence that has been contributing to all this destruction.

(g) Through the cease-fire that comes out of the mediation efforts of a mediator acceptable to both parties and proper monitoring by the same mediator, the work of the Select Committee could be carried out in a more credible manner.

(h) The discussion and follow-up process through the Select Committee on issues where agreement is reached at joint negotiations involving the Government, the main opposition party and the LTTE with the help of a third party mediator is a very useful method. The two major political parties should take the ethnic problem above party politics in the above manner in the interest of the people of the country. The LTTE, the other political parties and all other organisations should play their respective roles on the same basis.

(i) As a friendly neighbour and as a country having close links with us in several spheres, India is the obvious first choice for third party mediation. It is expected that India's concern for the suffering people and the magnanimity of the people of India will soon help to erase any bitter memories of the recent years and pave the way for the Government of India to come in and play an active and constructive role as a mediator.

(j) As the further escalation of the war itself and conscription (if true) are matters of major concern to the public, the Government should consult all sections of the people even at this late stage. An appropriate step at this juncture is a referendum to find out whether the people really want this damaging war to continue or they would rather prefer fresh efforts towards a negotiated settlement through third party mediation or facilita-

tion. In such a negotiation process the devolution proposals of the Government, amended as per suggestions in section 7, could be one of the basic documents.

(k) Basic needs should be provided as a matter of urgency to all the displaced persons and others who have been made refugees.

(l) While discussions on Devolution and related issues continue, the details of resettlement, reconstruction and rehabilitation should be worked out simultaneously groups consisting of Government representatives and the local political and administrative machinery, including the militant cadres in the respective areas and steps taken for early implementation. The rehabilitation should also cover the rehabilitation of human beings. The amnesty offered by the Government should be kept open and the protection of everyone should be ensured.

(m) The suggestions made in this paper concerning the legal document do not cover all relevant matters. However, the other suggestions made in this paper will help to obtain the views of all concerned.

(n) The suggestions which have been made in this paper attempt to show a peaceful way to handle a problem which has proved intractable to date. There will be always some delays in the attainment of the full benefits of any peace process. Therefore, all of us should patiently carry out the respective tasks that are expected of us.

(o) In this paper, it has been described as to how the Devolution Commission and its supporting Peace Secretariat should function to implement the solution to the Ethnic Problem.

(p) Some important matters that need to be considered immediately by these organisations have been spelt out.

(q) It has been suggested that these two organisations should, in the first instance, function as a Peace Council and a Peace Secretariat.

(r) Certain matters which were referred to as matters needing detailed study have been discussed in some detail and included as matters for further consideration by the Peace Council and the Peace Secretariat.

(s) There are also matters that have not been touched on here. Implementation of Tamil as an Official Language is a Right that has been denied to the Tamil speaking people. A Government which claims that it is committed to bring peace cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the non-implementation of Tamil as an Official Language. Strict instructions should go to Government organisations to reply in Tamil when they are written to in Tamil if officers fail to do this their extra allowances for the so called proficiency in Tamil should be stopped and action initiated to punish them for wrongfully drawing such allowances.

(t) Finally brief comments are needed about the so-called silence of Tamils. At times when people are emotionally charged, silence is a virtue. When the Government and the LTTE are fighting there is very little that peace loving Tamils or for that matter any peace loving citizen of the country can do. Harmless communications with intentions to bring about peace, help the suffering people, raising funds to help children's education in their present pathetic displaced state, etc are often viewed with suspicion by those in authority. This has filtered down to many levels and to some of the guardians of the law in particular, who are looking for a tiger in every Tamil and in everything that they do. It is up to the Government to change this and show the proper way though a recommencement of the peace talks with the help of third party mediation as suggested here.

(Concluded)

**The author retired from Government Service in February 1995 after 35 years of service under different Governments. The last position held was Additional Secretary to the President. Recent discussions with interested persons resulted in the revision of the earlier paper prepared in April 1996. The author's thanks are due to them. The views expressed here are the author's personal views.*

DEVE GOWDA GOVERNMENT FALLS AS CONGRESS WITHDRAWS SUPPORT

By T N Gopalan

The 10-month old Deve Gowda government was voted out in the Lok Sabha around midnight on 11 April, plunging India into yet another period of uncertainty and confusion.

The fall comes in the wake of the withdrawal of support by the Indian National Congress. However, the other major national party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), voted against the United Front (UF) government.

The UF, a coalition of 13 parties, together commanded only 177 seats in the Lok Sabha, and the Gowda regime had survived in power thus far only because of the support extended by the Congress which has 144 members in the lower house of the Indian Parliament.

What will happen now? Will the UF and Congress come together again under a new leader or are mid-term polls inevitable given the current configurations in the Lok Sabha and the respective political compulsions of the major groupings? All kinds of conjectures are going the rounds, but everyone agrees that the octogenarian President of the Congress, Mr Sitaram Kesri, has unnecessarily plunged the nation into a totally unwarranted period of crisis and confusion by unilaterally withdrawing his party's support to the UF government.

All the same nobody has, at least not as yet, any apprehensions over the survival of democracy - and thus despite the fact that even a fresh round of polls might not result in a decisive mandate for either the Congress or the BJP and with no single party in a position to form a government, the country could be in for a prolonged period of uncertainty. Nobody talks of a constitutional break-down or a military coup. Even at the worst of times, there would still be a modicum of good sense left in the Indian politicians and they would not be so foolish as to allow the boat in which they are riding to capsize as a result of their murderous bickerings, it is generally believed.

Even more important, the secular stream would somehow rally together and ensure that the polity is not held to ransom by antedeluvian ideologues who are itching to convert Mother Bhrat into a vicious communal battleground.

It was such a good sense in fact which drove the United Front parties and the Congress into partnership in June last. For who would have believed that such a wide array of regional parties like the DMK, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Samajvadi party (SP) besides the Janata Dal with a token national presence, all thriving on anti-congressism, could come together, accept the support of the Congress from the outside and seek to form a government? If they had not, it would have been a constitutional impasse, possibly necessitating another round of polls then itself.

The UF, a post-election phenomenon, was allowed to garner all the ministerial offices for itself and run the nation and the Congress contented itself to remaining in the background all in an effort to keep the BJP out.

Whatever its greed, opportunism and sheer rottenness these days, the fact remains that the Congress is almost the sole unifying factor in the multi-nationa entity of India - unifying not merely in the

sense it has a national presence but also that it is eminently secular and as a party it tends to rise above narrow parochial considerations. It was that inbuilt spirit of secularism which made Congressmen reconcile themselves to supporting a government composed of many inveterate anti-Congress leaders.

And no one except a cussed man like H D Deve Gowda could have managed to upset such a wonderful arrangement in such a short period Gowda was a dark horse and he got the job by default. There was no other leader in the UF who would have been found palatable by the Congress at the time. All that was required of the head of the UF was to keep the supporting Congress appropriately placated. Gowda too was doing so in the beginning, doing some fine balancing act among the various UF constituents on the one hand and vis a vis the Congress on the other hand in fact at one time he so willingly let himself be led by the nose by whoever mattered in the scheme of things that he almost became a laughing stock.

But by the time Narasimha Rao made way for Kesri as the Congress President in September, power had gone to his head and he started treating the main supporting party with lordly indifference, if not total contempt Kesri repeatedly hinted that he was not amused by Gowda's antics, but the PM, in his misplaced sense of importance and overweening arrogance, would not take the message. Not even when Kesri managed to install himself as the Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Party and declared that the Congress's support could not be taken for granted, it would be issue-based and so on, Gowda would change his behaviour accordingly. Instead he unleashed his hatchet-man, the CBI Director Joginder Singh on all his adversaries, potential and actual. A five-year old murder case was revived and Kesri was made to look a suspect through inspired leaks. His assets were investigated and he himself was grilled. Gowda even stopped making courtesy calls on the CPP leader and would not consult the Congress on any major issue. He mistakenly thought that because Congress was in a bad shape and would not dare face the electorate, it would not dare topple his regime either.

Apart from the fact that his Finance Minister presented a budget which was widely welcomed by the industry and journalists and which did not increase the tax burden, the score-card of the Gowda government read absolutely pathetically. It could not or did not fulfil any of the major promises made in the Common Minimum Programme drawn up at the time of the formulation of the UF.

Whether it was economic initiatives aimed at bettering the lot of the deprived sections or devolution of more powers to the states or maximum autonomy to Kashmir or in blatantly violating constitutional provisions and fending off the BJP in Uttar Pradesh or cosying up to such a wretchedly communal character like Bal Thackeray or failing to tackle such sensitive inter-state disputes like the Cauvery of the festering North East rebellion.

Everywhere down the line, Gowda was exposed for what he was - a crassly incompetent but disgustingly opportunistic politician who would meet with his nemesis earlier than he himself realised or acknowledged.

Well there were some welcome foreign policy initiatives indeed. Like the resumption of dialogue with Pakistan and the agreement on the sharing of the waters of River Padma with Bangladesh but the credit should go the wizened foreign minister I K Gujral though the Prime Minister could be complimented for not standing in the way of his minister. And even in this sphere Gowda could not show enough sensitivity to the feelings of Tamil Nadu and permitted Gujral to give a virtual carte blanche to the Chandrika regime without seeking to push it to the negotiating table. That a junior minister from the UK should broker an agreement between the two major Sri Lankan parties on the ethnic issue is a sufficient commentary on the way India has let itself be marginalised in this part of the subcontinent.

By and large, any way, as noted Praful Boidwai acidly remarked, "The Front has all but betrayed its early promise. Apart from keeping the BJP out of power at the Centre, it performs no useful function."

Besides Gowda kept his own counsel and operated only through his confidant and Information Minister, Mr Ibrahim, unscrupulous and crafty, distancing himself from the other UF leaders. Everyone has some grievance or other. If Chandrababu Naidu was cheesed off over Gowda's failure to make his home state of Karnataka behave in the Alamatti dam controversy, Karunanidhi was very unhappy that the Prime Minister would not do a thing to make Karnataka honour the interim award of the Tribunal on Cauvery. Moopanar felt that he was being targeted in the Indian Bank scam - though the tact remains that many TMC leaders had benefited by the munificence of the previous chairman and Moopanar nominee M Gopalakrishnan and the bank had almost gone on the verge of bankruptcy. Besides on many occasions Gowda has slighted Moopanar, his loyalists assert. And so when the final blow came, the UF partners prepared to ditch Gowda, though for the records they maintained solidarity with him.

Kesri himself had been angered by reports that Gowda was cultivating some dissident Congress MPs and was luring them with offers of office and so peremptorily, without even consulting other senior Congress leaders, called on the President of India, submitted a letter withdrawing his party's support to the UF and staked his own claim to form a government.

The entire nation was dumbfounded, the stock-markets tumbled and the UF leaders were at their wits end. President Sharma gave ten days to Gowda to prove his majority on the floor of the House. The UF had to come up with some solution within that time.

At one stage the UF did remain firm and said the leadership issue was not negotiable and refused to support a Congress-led government. There were grumblings within the Congress over the precipitate move of Kesri. But hopes of a split in the Congress proved short-lived and the UF realised that the only way out was to replace Gowda with someone more acceptable to the Congress if elections were to be avoided.

Clearly none wanted immediate elections. Apart from the uncertainty of it all, there were wide-spread fears that the BJP would be the gainer in the process. And so in order to avoid the polls, avoid a loss of face all ground and forestall BJP machinations, Deve Gowda had to go, the other UF leaders realised. Certainly Congress too had climbed down from its earlier position of forming its own government and seeking the UF support. And so even as the debate was on, the UF frantically tried to persuade Gowda to step down before the confidence motion was voted upon.

But he would not oblige them. He in fact felt let down and went on to make a fighting speech in the Lok Sabha, defending his record, claiming innocence, attacking fiercely Kesri who had called him coward and incompetent a couple of days earlier and vowed to rise from the ashes.

Nobody was impressed. Not even the BJP to which he had sent feelers immediately after Kesri met the President. Reportedly he suggested to the BJP that it abstain from the voting, save his government. On the floor of the house, after which he would tender his resignation and recommend dissolution and polls. He would remain caretaker prime minister in the interim. Such was his lust for power and sense of hurt. He would bring down the entire House along with him.

The BJP did toy with the idea for some time but finally decided against the option. For it wanted to show up all the other parties as incompetent and unfit to govern the nation and increase the pressure on the president to order dissolution and polls when they would be returned with a lot more seats. (Presently their tally falls well short of 200 and so nowhere near a majority in the 545-member House.)

And so Gowda has been voted out. At the time of writing this piece there were hectic confabulations between the UF and

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Dilemma of the Left in India

By G.Ramesh

The Left in India still has the time to go along the path of a historic compromise, said West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, to his authoritative biographer two months ago. He came up with a separate interview holding the politburo of his party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), for not allowing him or others join, or even lead, the united front government at the centre. When the crucial decision was taken in May last year, the 83-year-old Basu and 68-year-old party general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, were outvoted on this point. The politburo clearly viewed the situation in a different light. The CPI(M), they held, could join the government only if it is in a position to command the programmes of such a government! They had in mind the Kerala and West Bengal models. And the CPI(M) ended up outside the government and the CPI, its junior partner in the governments of the two states, coolly joined the government. Basu was clearly peeved at this sudden development!

Basu's revolt in December was a clear warning of things to come. Basu and Surjeet are now playing a vital role in the ongoing united front-Congress(I) talks to evolve some mechanism to accommodate the latter. Of course, Basu would not join a government in which the Congress(I) will be a major partner. However, he is not averse to joining, or even leading, a government with Congress(I) support. Surjeet too recognises the fact that if the CPI(M) has a chance of actually getting to power at the centre, it will be through Basu and now. The choice of getting into the government at the centre gives the party a new face of acceptance and responsibility and a chance to acquire new power bases, reckons Surjeet.

What makes Basu tick ? Charisma ? Bengali bhadralok manners ? His grasp of the Bengali public sphere ? The veteran Marxist seems to have completely sized up Bengal politics during the last two decades. He has ensured that the CPI(M) remains a predominantly grassroots outfit in the state, pushing, both within and outside the power structure, for land reforms and health and literacy programmes. The support for the party ensures the election of 30-odd left front candidates from the state to the parliament in every election. There is no one to challenge Basu within the left front which he keeps in his iron grip. The only challenger was the burly Nitin Chakraborty of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) who levelled corruption charges against Basu. Nitin-da was provoked and ousted from the left front cabinet some years ago. The CPI is not willing to take on Basu. Even the Congress(I) in Bengal is split into two factions - one going somewhat soft on Basu admiring him as a great Bangla leader, and the other, led by the hardline Mamata Bannerjea wanting to oust him from power.

Educated in Britain, Basu, the young leftist, returned to India and worked for the CPI. After decades of toil, he left the CPI when the party split over the Sino-Soviet schism in the early sixties. He was a founder- member of the CPI(M) which went on to criticise the Sino-Indian war. He was among those targetted by the media and dubbed "anti-national". Basu got rid of the stigma as the extremist ideologues parted company with him in 1967. He was the deputy chief minister in a coalition government at that time. Throughout the turbulent late sixties, Basu kept his cool, as the CPI(M) lost power, and the leftists went into a fratricidal war. In between, his party, the CPI(M), went on to support the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi when it was reduced to a minority after the historic 1969 split. Soon, he was at the receiving end, as Mrs Gandhi, after winning the Bangla Deshwar, wanted to consolidate the Congress base in Bengal. Basu could not even contest the 1972 elections. He spent the Emergency in the jail, only to come out and win the assembly elections. The left front never lost power thereafter.

Basu's overall strategy has been to project himself as a sensitive Bengali reformer, in the great tradition of Sri Vivekananda and Satyajit Ray, who belong not just to Bengal but to all of India. His most recent candid comment is on why the Communists should reevaluate the great contributions of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. With Basu in power, the CPI(M) took several initiatives both in Bengal and at the national level. Bengal got rid of its recurrent power crises as Basu successfully wooed Indian companies and even some multinationals to invest in Bengal. At the political level, Basu repeatedly worked for alliances among non-Congress parties. He also has excellent personal rapport with Congress and BJP leaders. He recently brokered a deal with Bangla Desh for sharing the Ganga waters. And, most importantly, he maintains a cool intellectual side and never lets go a chance to host international dignitaries - Francois Mitterand, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat, Gunter Grass, Noam Chomsky and even Jacques Derrida have been in his Calcutta!

The CPI(M)'s problems in coming to terms with wielding power arise from two sources. First one is the party's Kerala lobby. Led by chief minister E K Nayanar, this lobby is of the view that the CPI(M) cannot rely on unstable allies over a long time. Neither the Congress nor the united front constituents are trustworthy, according to Nayanar and comrades. The CPI(M) is bound to be dictated by other parties in the ruling arrangement at the centre, they feel. The CPI(M) has another lobby led by young and articulate ideologues like Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury who think that the party has a better chance of pushing its programmes if it stays outside power "as of now". The decision to be part of the united front yet keep off the cabinet had been their idea, after all. This way, they are left with some power but no responsibility. But when a government is about to fall, they end up bearing all the responsibility for such a collapse!

The CPI and CPI(M) have supported several governments at the centre in the past. Both parties lent crucial support to Mrs Gandhi during 1969-71 on the question of implementing socialist policies. In the process, both parties had no option but to lose heavily in terms of power bases. The CPI(M) lost power in Bengal. The the CPI continued to latch on to Mrs Gandhi right through the infamous Emergency. The CPI(M) went ahead to lend qualified support to the 1977-79 Janata government led by Morarji Desai. Later, both parties vociferously supported the 1989-90 governmenet led by V P Singh even as the BJP pulled the rugs from under his feet.

The CPI(M)'s current strategy seems to keep a non-Congress, non-BJP front going in the centre. Apart from this, the CPI(M), the premier leftist party in India, has failed to achieve much in terms of expanding its power base outside Kerala, West Bengal and a few pockets in other states. The CPI has lost ground steadily

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the Congress. No one seems to know what will happen now. But the very fact even after the defeat of the Gowda regime, most of the parties are planning to sit together and pass the Finance Bill which only would make Chidambaram's budget effective, shows that there is still some hope. The mainstream secular parties are showing enough care to frustrate the designs of communal forces - however genuine or not their own commitment might be - and if they show equal care to opt for someone who would not be as provincial and petty as Gowda, that would bode well for the nation. ❑

ATTEMPT TO IMPLICATE JAYA BOOMERANGS ON DMK

T N Gopalan

Politicians rarely, if ever, learn. Least of all those in the mould of Karunanidhi and Jayalalitha. Not long ago, the late Kamaraj described the DMK and the AIADMK as "ore kuttaiyil ooriya iru mattaikal" - meaning in effect that they were birds of the same feather. When it comes to meanness, arrogance, corruption or vindictiveness, there is generally nothing much to choose between Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi, though the latter is any day a little bit more graceful and a little less revolting. And in his latest stint the septuagenarian war-horse takes pains to go out of his way to prove that he has learnt his lessons and has grown quite mature.

However the incidents last month relating to an explosive photograph showing Jayalalitha "in the company of Rajiv Gandhi's assassins, Dhanu and Sivarasan" rudely shattered all the fond hopes of those who believed Karunanidhi was a changed man these days and that by proving decisively that under him the state would be much better off he would forestall any possibility of Jayalalitha's staging a come-back.

Once again he came over as a mean and vindictive man, very unrepentant to boot. By the same token. Jayalalitha does seem to have scored a signal victory and won some measure of public sympathy.

The citizens of Tamil Nadu woke up on 28 March to be confronted with what was touted to be a most sensational photograph of recent times - that of Dhanu and Sivarasan in the company of Jayalalitha. It was actually a group photo of some AIADMK leaders including such persons as S Thirunavukkarasu and H V Hande. Indian Express, its vernacular stablemate Dinamani and the Tamil bi-weekly Junior Vikatan which carried the photograph also claimed that the picture should have been shot sometime in 1990. While the newspapers confined themselves to merely carrying the picture, identifying those found in it and mentioning the possible date, the sensation-mongering Junior Vikatan went on to raise many disturbing questions - how come the dreaded assassins came so close to the former chief minister, was such an association merely accidental or was there anything more sinister, did Sivarasan and Dhanu carry the photograph around and gain access in AIADMK circles in furtherance of their monstrous designs and solemnly hoped that if only the other AIADMK leader found in the photo could recall the past and explain the proximity of the assassins to Jayalalitha one more link in the assassination could be unravelled.

The more respectable Dinamani and Indian Express did not indulge in such terrifying speculations, but the intention was clear - to implicate Jayalalitha in the assassination.

The lady found next to Jayalalitha and the young man not far away do have striking resemblance to Dhanu and Sivarasan - those who are familiar with the famous picture of Dhanu, garland in hand and kurta-clad Sivarasan, waiting for Rajiv's arrival in Sriperumbudur would indeed have been tempted to believe that the two found in the group photograph were indeed the Jaffna-duo. But can the press go without checking its authenticity and verifying accuracy of the identity of persons claimed to be in the photograph, particularly in the context of the seriousness of the allegation of a link between the leader of a political party and the alleged assassins of Rajiv Gandhi?

Besides Jayalalitha looks so slim in the picture that one would think twice before dating it to early 1990 - by 1989 she had grown quite obese. Evidently in their zeal to fix her or serve Karunanidhi's ends, the editors did not bother to stop and think even for a moment.

Predictably the Assembly was rocked by the "scandal". While the DMK-men themselves were silent, under instructions from their high commend, the Tamil Maanilla Congress (TMC) MLAs shook with righteous indignation, drew most outrageous inferences and demanded immediate arrest of Jayalalitha for her role in the conspiracy behind Rajiv's murder.

Karunanidhi himself would not directly comment on the issue but hurled a number of innuendoes at her, wondering why she should have avoided the Sriperumbudur meeting and why the AIADMK leaders failed to turn up to receive Rajiv Gandhi at the airport during that visit, noting that she had backed the LTTE even after the Padmanabha massacre and so on. To get at the truth he would go in for a thoroughgoing enquiry, he announced.

The protests of the small AIADMK group proved ineffectual. Already that stormy petrel R Thamaraikani had been suspended from the House for the rest of the budget session for making "unsubstantiated allegations" against Arcot Veerasamy, a senior minister and a confidant of the Chief Minister. The suspension too had attracted widespread criticism with the more objective section among the press seriously questioning the impartiality of Speaker Palanivel Rajan and reminding him of the fate of his notorious predecessor Sedapatti R Muthiah.

But Palanivel Rajan was determined to allow the TMC MLAs and the Chief Minister savage Jaya and so he contemptuously brushed aside the objections raised by AIADMK group's leader Thirunavukkarasu who vaguely recalled that the two in the photograph could be advocates from Dharmapuri and that the photograph might have been taken sometime in 1988. Further even if the two were really Dhanu and Sivarasan, could one not

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in the peasant heartland of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. In Bihar, the warring leftwing extremist groups have been the beneficiaries. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, non-left forces have captured the power bases. A certain uneasiness in leading the struggles of depressed classes and castes has cost both the CPI and the CPI(M) heavily. The CPI(M) shows no signs of taking up caste-related issues or striking compromises with extremist leftist groups and grassroot organisations which have managed to acquire substantial bases. In the urban trade union front too, the BJP has been making steady inroads into left and Congress bastions. The CPI, which managed to get two berths in the union cabinet, is also finding it tough to expand its base when it is inside the government. Its long-time leader Indrajit Gupta is too suave and soft-spoken to be a tough-talking home minister of the entire country. He is known to have put in his papers after he was repeatedly ignored by prime minister H D Deve Gowda on crucial issues. Being in power demands attending to a different set of priorities and Gupta is just learning the ropes. The performances of Socialists while in power has not been much to speak of either. Chandra Shekhar has held the top post in the government, but had to quit having antagonised his supporter-from-outside, the Congress(I). And another ardent Socialist, George Fernandes, never got a chance to be a minister for more than two years.

The CPI(M) is clearly aware that it cannot work for long with a negative plank, that of keeping the BJP or Congress out of power. It has to develop a framework by which it can deliver the promises made to the electorate when the party is in power. In the process, if the party loses power, it's fine. That's the only way it can hope to expand its power base. For the time being, any chief minister can hope to have a shot at the Delhi throne. And Basu. quite rightly, feels: "why not me, the son of Bengal?" He needs a new framework for the centre, if he has to keep up his own standards in Bengal. ❑

interpret it to mean that the Tigers were having a dry run, testing their access to senior Tamil Nadu politicians, he wondered. But he was heckled and shouted down by the DMK and the TMC benches.

But even as they were lustily cheering the Chief Minister for his "patriotism and responsible approach to such a matter of national importance, " came a body blow to the DMK's designs from a most unexpected quarter - a Janata Dal member from Dharmaspuri, who had until then been denied an opportunity to make a point, got up and told a stunned house that the two identified as Dhanu and Sivarasan were only lawyers from his area, that they belonged to the AIADMK lawyers' wing and that he knew both of them personally.

The Chair post-haste wound up the discussions on the issue, but no one expressed regrets for having slandered a former Chief Minister or would challenge the Dal member's assertions.

The press did appear contrite. The managed to bring themselves to despatch their reporters to Dharmapuri locate the lawyers, Dhakshayini and Nanje Gowda and record their statements to the effect that they had indeed called on Jayalalitha in early 1988 when the photograph was taken. The very next day the two were produced before the press and an ailing Jayalalitha appeared in person, for the first time in two months since she was rushed to the hospital for treatment for spondyliosis. She was at her hysterical best, threatening to sue the press and finding the hand of the government in the frame-up. For once she found many sympathetic ears. There was not an iota of doubt in anyone's mind that it was the government which had tried to damn and embarrass Jaya further by planting the photos in and that a foolish Press had willingly obliged. The general surmise was that the picture should have been taken out of the albums recovered from the Poes Garden during the repeated raids a couple of months ago.

In 1989 when her faction fared rather badly in the elections, a dispirited Jaya decided to call it a day but her then confidant Natarajan snatched the letter from her hands and took it away. Tipped of the development. Karunanidhi had held his hand at the time.

There is indeed a qualitative change in the situation now, what with Jaya's name in the mud for her various acts of commission and commission. Still coming as it does, after the Pudukotiai by-election in which the DMK's victory margin had come down drastically and with a possible realignment of political forces, an alliance between the AIADMK and Gopalsamy's MDMK, for instance, the photograph incident has only served to revive the sagging morale of the AIADMK.

The return of instability in the Centre has already unnerved the DMK a bit. Was it not after the fall of the V P Singh government that Karunanidhi's own was dismissed in 1991? Besides continuing corruption at lower levels, the high-handedness of Karunanidhi's son M K Azhagiri and of the DMK functionaries in general and all round price rise, are all taking their toll on the government's popularity. To make matters worse the TMC seems set to open a new front against its electoral ally, choosing to attack the government on the issue of non-devolution of powers and funds to the municipalities and panchayats. None other than the TMC No. 2 and Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram himself held out a threat of statewide agitation at a public meeting. Another Union Minister, S R Balasubramanian said that the tie-up with the DMK was only temporary-as had been the case with the AIADMK alliance - and so called upon the TMC cadres to prepare to fight the next elections on their own. Clearly the situation is hotting up and the DMK must needs be extremely cautious, avoid similar gaffes and concentrate on governance instead of witchhunting if it does not want to forfeit the people's goodwill. ❑

READERS FORUM

ICONS AND ICONOCLASTS

The commentary by G Ramesh entitled, "Sharmans and Deities of Tamil Nadu Old and New" (TT, March 1997) was appreciated, though its tone was somewhat cynical. Ramesh has provided a capsule history of the ideological adjustments taken by the Dravidian front leaders in Tamil Nadu to capture the seat of power and to hold it permanently. Permit me to express a few points on this theme.

I sense that Ramesh uses the phrase "Dravidian cadres" somewhat derisively. For better or worse, the majority of the Tamil Nadu voters have continuously elected the DMK or ADMK for 30 years since 1967, and they have turned their backs to the grand old Congress Party (stinking with corruption of Himalayan proportions, and whose current policies run counter to the principles of Mahatma Gandhi) or non-Dravidian parties, which include the Communists of more than one variety. Pundits can call it stupidity (or obscene, as Dr S Sivasegaram is fond of calling the Tamil Nadu politics). But, please give the Devil its due. None of the Dravidian front leaders who became the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu (Anna, Karunanidhi, MGR and Jayalalitha) during the past 30 years placed a gun on the voter's head and demanded their allegiance. The Dravidian front leaders played the "democratic game" according to the stipulated rules (as it is played in Britain or USA) and they won it fair and square. This is because the Dravidian platform appeals well to the inner sentiments of Tamils, similar to the platitudes such as "freedom and liberty" or "Jesus lives" trotted out by American politicians, which appeal to the average American Joe and Mary. So, it is a futile exercise to decipher deeper meanings for the actions of politicians like Karunanidhi on the basis of atheism or conversion to singular godhead and what not.

When one looks beyond the borders of India, we can be assured that what happened in Tamil Nadu is not an aberration. In the Soviet Union and in China, iconoclasts like Lenin and Mao were transformed into icons by the communist cadres. We should also note that Periyar E V Ramaswamy and his then lieutenant (Thalapathy) V N Annadurai, with their speeches and stage dramas, modelled their Dravidian platform in the early 1940s on a homespun version of communism. Stalin, the name Karunanidhi gave to his son (who is now being promoted to take over the top job from his dad) is an example for this communist honeymoon period of the Dravidian leaders. The red colour in the red and black DMK flag also, I believe, is a borrowing from the Communist symbol. Even MGR, after he formed his breakaway ADMK in 1972, espoused his Annaism philosophy as the "best amalgam from democratic, socialist and communist principles". Though many laughed at it as a joke, if he is alive, even MGR may find it amusing that Japan provides a good example of his Annaism philosophy, where the society life is based on an amalgam of "little democracy, little socialism and little communism". One can even postulate that MGR must have received inspiration for his Annaism philosophy from Japan almost a quarter of a century ago, because he had some fascination for Japanese gadgets like the camera (being a movie star, this is not a surprise!) And visited this country to shoot his own production, "Ulagam Suttrum Vaatiban".

Sachi Sri Kantha
5-16-305 Tsukimicho,
Fukuroi City, Shizuoka 437-01, Japan

Capitalist Society & Schizophrenia

I do not know whether Dr.R.Sivamo-han is a Bachelor of Medicine or a scho-lar of another subject. However, certain assertions relating to mental illness in the article "The Moral Centred Society" (TT 15 March 1997) cannot be allowed to remain without comment as there is a likelihood that the non-tutored reader might accept the comments as arising from detailed knowledge of the topic.

The statement that ".... Schizophrenia is a psychological sickness one can get in a capitalist society, where he is so thoroughly alienated from his real nature...." is totally wrong.

The prevalence rate of Schizophrenia in any society anywhere in the world is approximately the same and is about eight in a thousand. Therefore it is very likely that some bio-chemical dysfunction contributes very much to the onset of the disorder and not the level of "civilisation" or "sophistication" of the society.When the author refers to ".....long periods of suffering with deep worries, difficulties with concentration and difficulties with rest.....", he/she is probably referring to the condition called Depressive disorder (also known as Depressive illness, Clinical depression or just Depression) and not Schizophrenia.

Dr.R.Thaya-Paran, FRCP
Billericay, Essex, UK

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MATRIMONIAL

Seeking *professionally qualified partner, 39 to 45, for Jaffna Christian spinster doctor in UK employment. Christians, Catholics considered. Please give all details in first letter. Divorcees, widowers not considered. M 923 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu professional from Australia *seeks educated lady partner, 35-40. Please send details and recent photo to M 927 c/o Tamil Times.*

Ceylon Tamil *seeks partner for her sister, 34, certified general accounts, employed but having right hand slightly affected from birth, Canadian citizen. Send details M 928 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek partner for daughter, 36, good permanent employment in Canada, innocent divorcee, no encumbrances. Send details. M 929 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu family *seeks educated bride in UK for graduate son, 26. British citizen in good UK employment. Send full details. M 930 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek educated partner for their pretty daughter, fair, 5'4", 28. Write with full details to M 931 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Catholic mother *seeks professional groom for daughter, 36, Research Officer in University Hospital in USA. Send details. M 932 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Christian parents *seek partner, 30-35, for daughter, 29, M.Sc., Electrical Engineer in good employment in Canada. Send details. M 933 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu sister *seeks bride below 33 for UK qualified Civil Engineer, 38, British Citizen, UK professional preferred. Please send photo, details. M 934 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek bride (in US preferred) for son, 35, Mechanical Engineer, permanent US resident, Mars afflicted seventh house. Send horoscope, details. M 935 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Gunaseelan *son of Mr. & Mrs. Jayasingam of 99 Landseer Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 6HS. and* **Geetha** *daughter of the late Mr. S.D. Balarajah and Mrs. P. Balarajah of 21 Haydon Park Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8JQ on 22.3.97 at Rutlish Hall, Mostyn Road, London SW19.*

Dr. Kannan Athavan *son of Mr. & Mrs. Karuna Nithi of 12 Manor Drive, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7LG and* **Dr. Angela Jane** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Roger Smith of 42 The Mount, Curdworth, Warwickshire B76 9HR on 22.3.97 at St. Cuthbert's Church, Shustoke, Warwickshire.*

OBITUARIES

Mr. Muthu Ambikaipahan *(Ambi), (61), formerly Statistical Officer, C.T.B., Narahenpita, Sri Lanka; beloved husband of Thavamani; loving father of Pahalavan, late Anapayan and Lohini; loving brother of Mrs. Maheswary Balasingham; father-in-law of Rajeswaran; uncle of Mrs. Mala Krishnarajah; grandfather of Kriththiharan, Suranutha, Priyankan and Krishnavi, all of London passed away on 28th March 1997 in London and was cremated on 5th April 1997.*

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. – 5 Abbeywood Road, Abbey Wood, London SE2 9ED. Tel: 0181 244 9795.

Ganeswary *(born 1917), beloved wife of the late Mr. E.S. Ponnudurai of Alaveddy South; daughter of the late Mr. S.A. Kanagaratnam and the late Mrs. Nagapoosani Kanagaratnam of Sandilipay North; sister of Kaneswaran and Kaileswaran; loving mother of Dr. Siva Sivakumaran (UK), the late Srikumaran, Jayanthi, Jeyakumaran and Vasanthi, expired peacefully on 02.02.97 and was cremated the next day in Vaddukoddai (where she was resident since 1983 with her daughter-in-law Rajes Srikumaran. The Anthiesty also was held there on 4th March 1997. – 3 Savile Close, New Malden, Surrey KT3 5QG, UK.*

Mrs Grace Nagaratnam Rasiah, *formerly Varuththalavilan, Tellipallai and Ilavalai, passed away peacefully in Colombo on 5th April 1997. Only daughter of late Mr. & Mrs. Suntharam of Siruppidy and Nallur and only sister of late . G.O.D.B. Overseer Kanapathipillai of Karaitivu (E.P.), she is beloved wife of late Mr. M.A. Rasiah (former Headmaster in Ceylon and teacher at Herts Tamil School, Watford); loving amma to Sathianathan (Watford – 01923 662970), Packiarajah (Kaluwanchikudi, E.P.), Bhavani Stella (Dubai – 450729), Uthayashankar (New Malden – 0181949 2888), Nanthini Theresa (Mathagal – lately Batticaloa), Logan Rasiah (Watford – 01923 463466), and Rangini Emilda (Canada – 905 887 0073); mother-in-law of Rasammah, Anuradha, Devendra (Appu), Ranji, Nagarajah, Catherine and Daniel; loving appamma and ammamma to Ammu, Sonna, Mathu, Thayalan, Andrew, Dharun, Rajen, Ravi, Uma, Vijay, Anand, Sarene, Jemina, Damian and Dinanna.*

The funeral took place on 8th April at Wattala Cemetery. Her family members wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral and those who sent floral tributes and messages. – 1453 High Road, Leavesden, Watford, Herts WD2 7AP, UK.

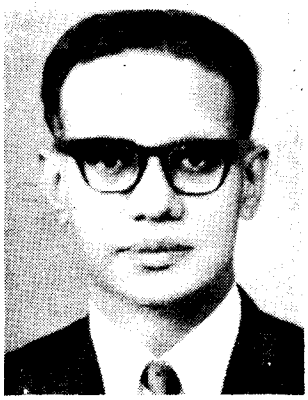
Mr. Pradeep Jeganathan. *Lecturer in Mathematics, University of Transkei, South Africa; beloved youngest son of Mr. & Mrs. K. Jeganathan, formerly of Jaffna and presently of Butterworth, Transkei.; loving brother of Mythili (Transkei), Janarthana (Sydney, Australia) and Dr. Sanjayan (Cape Town); brother-in-law of Saththianathan, Meera, and Sivajini; uncle of Gajanan, Mayuran and Janani, passed away under tragic circumstances on 31st March 1997 – gunned down by car hi-jackers who fled with his car. The funeral rites were performed by Swami Chaithany Ananda of Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rochester, New York, a close friend of the family, on 5th April.*

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow – 8 Kylami Flats, Butterworth, Transkei, South Africa.

For Sale

1992 Built House in Mattakkuliya, near beach, 3 bed rooms (one with en-suite B/room), one additional bathroom/wc, one wc, telephone. Please reply E 75 c/o Tamil Times with telephone number.

IN MEMORIAM



In everloving memory of **Mr. Vellupillai Nadarajah,** *formerly Director, Ceylon School of Social Work, son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Vellupillai of Chetty Street, Nallur, Sri Lanka; son-in-law of the late Mr. K. Muthulingam and Mrs. Muthulingam of Tellipallai, Sri Lanka on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 4.4.91.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Muthu Ambikai; daughter Dr. Sakunthala; son Dr. Ravindran; son-in-law Dr. Suresh Thayalan; daughter-in-law Meera; grandchildren Arjun, Nisha and Sathiya. – 11 Baronia Croft, Highwoods, Colchester, Essex CO4 5EF.

In loving memory of **Mr. Visvalingam Sivasubramaniam,** *Principal Emeritus, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam on the first anniversary of his passing away on 26.4.96.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Sironmany; children Dr. Sivanandarajah, Sivagnanasunderam, Dr. Sivapalan, Sivathasan, Sivaratnam, Sivamanoharan and Sivaloshanadevi; son-in-law Thavarajah; daughters-in-law Manimehaladevi, Anandhi, Yogeswary, Kamaladevy, Supathiradevi and Devahi; grandchildren Sutharshan, Priyatharshini, Suseenthiran, Suhanthan, Sutharshika, Suloshan, Suthaharan, Sulakshan, Arooran, Gajamohana, Gajaharan and Vaishna. – 135A Sudbury Avenue, Wembley, Middx. HA0 6AW. Tel: 0181 385 0477.

In loving memory of Beloved

Amma
Leelawathy Elankanathan
Born: 24.8.32
Rest: 28.4.96

Appa
Saravanmuttu Ilankanathan
Born: 31.10.22
Rest: 18.2.94

Gently with love your memory is kept
In our hearts a silent sorrow
Silent, our tears that fall
Your spirit still felt
In triumph or disaster
Great courage, humour, wit and wisdom
Whose generosity knew no bounds
You are greatly missed for ever
And arein the thoughts of
All your family and friends.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by your ever-loving daughter Urmilia, son-in-law Kuha, grand daughters Shobi and Ranji – 58 Ringwood, South Bretton, Peterborough PE3 9SH. Tel: 01733 262760.

In loving memory of **Mrs Jeyamani Theresa Nicholas,** *beloved wife of Albert Arasaratnam Nicholas, former Manager of Oriental Bank, Berhad, who passed away on 28th August 1995.*

She was a lady who practised her faith devoutly and this saw her making a pilgrimage to Rome to meet the Pope. For more than 55 years, whatever the weather, she attended early morning dawn Mass and partook of Holy Communion daily except in 1979 when she suffered a stroke which hampered her movements.

Her walk of faith rubbed into all her children, five sons and three daughters, as well as her eight grandchildren, who preciously cherish the rich spiritual legacy she left behind to always trust in God, pray fervently and read the Bible daily. She was an active member of the Women's Institute and travelled with other members to Indonesia, Thailand and various parts of Malaysia to meet the needs of the poor and the forsaken. – Jeya Vasa, 31 Jalan Bunga Ros, 41100 Klang, Malaysia.

Tenth Death Anniversary
23.05.97

Mr. S. Sivasambo
(Retired Post Master)

Fondly remembered by wife Sivakkolunthu, children Sridas, Sriharan, Gowri and Sriskanthan, brothers in law Sivakurunathar and Sambasivam, and their families.

In cherished memory of **Mr. Chinnathampy Rasiah** *on the third anniversary of his passing away on 24.04.94.*

Deep in our hearts you will always stay
Loved and remembered every day.

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by his sorrowing wife Gunamany; sister Arianayagam; beloved children Rajan and Rajini; loving daughter-in-law Janaki; son-in-law Lakshman; grandchildren Thabojan, Prashanth and Sulakshan; sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces. – 14 Greenbriar Avenue, Wheelers Hill, Melbourne Vic 3150, Australia. – 3818 Campolindo Drive, Morga, 94556 California, USA.

In loving memory of **Mrs. Mathuraranee Paramananthan,** *Retired Teacher, Chundikuli Girls' College, Jaffna on the first anniversary of her passing away on 14th April 1996*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Paramananthan; sons Bahirathan and Uthiran (both of Sri Lanka); beloved sisters Thanes (Colombo), Rajes (UK) and Indirani (Jaffna); their families in Tellippalai, Colombo and UK. – 119 Hawley Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 1PB. Tel: 01322 279 451.

Mrs Rasamma Sabapathipillai *of Velanai, Sri Lanka, beloved wife of the late Naganathan Sabapathipillai, loving mother of the late Parasakthy, Varnakulasingam (Colombo), Sarojini (USA), Kularajasingam (Canada), and Kulathungam (USA); mother-in-law of the late Rajagopal, the late Padigalingam, Kamaladevi, Sarojinithevi and Manoranjitham; grandmothere of Somavathi, Sathiavathy, the late Thilagavathi, Sukunavathi, Maheswararan, Vani, Kumareswaran, Vasuki, Jegatheeswaran, Sarweswaran, Raveendiran, Rajendran, Jeyanthy, Gnanendran, Shanthi, Thanendran, Ananthy, Kunthavi, Ananthavi, Pamathy, Athavan, Senthuran, Murali and Myuran; great grandmother of Kanthan, Priya, Thenuha, Hamsan, Sharmiran, Praneetha, Prasheetha, Prashoban, Suman, Joe Anne, Michelle, Varan, Tara, Dharan, Neeran, Arthi, Ehan, Aran and Shankari, passed away at the ripe old age of 98 in Harrow, Middx., UK on 12.4.97 – 3 North Avenue, North Harrow, Middx HA2 7AE. Tel: 0181 723 6176.*

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

May 2 *Feast of St. Athanasius.*

May 3 *Krishna Ekathasi; 6.15pm Kokuvil Hindu College O.S.A. (UK) Presents variety entertainment at Claremont High School Hall, Claremont Avenue, Kenton, Harrow, Middx. Tel: 0181 578 3159/761 0358.*

May 4 *Pirathosam.*

May 6 *Amavasai.*

May 7 *Karthigai.*

May 8 *Feast of the Ascension of Lord Jesus.*

May 10 *Chathurthi.*

May 12 *Sashdi.*

May 18 *Ekathasi.*

May 19 *Pirathosam.*

May 21 *Vaikasi Visakam; Full Moon.*

May 22 *Feast of St. Rita.*

May 25 *Holy Trinity; 4.00pm London Tamil Christian Congregation celebrates 25th Anniversary with Special Service of Thanksgiving at Rivercourt Methodist Church, King Street, Hammersmith, London W6.*

May 25 *9.00am to 7.00pm Festival of Cricket at Norman Park, Bromley, Kent. Tel: 0181 930 2323/363 5770.*

May 26 *9.00am to 7.30pm Tamil Cricket and Netball Festival at Wadham Lodge Sports Centre, Wadham Road, London E17. Tel: 0171 403 4554.*

May 27 *Feast of St. Augustine.*

May 29 *Corpus Christi.*

May 31 *Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/ 4608.

May 3 *7.00pm London Sivan Temple presents Carnatic Vocal Concert by Smt Charumathi Ramachandran and Kumari Subhasri Ramachandran from India. Tel: 0181 318 9844/690 0401.*

May 11 *6.00pm Carnatic Flute by Master Shashank from India.*

May 25 *6.00pm Sitar by Shubendra Rao from India.*

Sri Lankan Teacher Wins Award in Seycelles

Mrs. Yoga Ravindran, Sri Lankan science teacher from Anse Royale School in Seycelles won the prestigious Commonwealth Association of Science Technology and Mathematics Education (CASTME) Award for her environmentally oriented project – 'Composting'. The award brings to focus the rapid development of science education and environmental studies in Seycelles. The above picture shows Mrs. Ravindran receiving the award and certificate from Dr. Andrew Salisbury, Chairman, CASTME at an impressive function at its secretariat in London.

Mr. Ravindran, Yoga's husband is the Acting Head of the School of Agriculture in the Seycelles Polytechnic and hails from Nawalapitiya where the family has long-standing educational connections with Kathiresan College.

Mridangam Chakravarti

Umayalpuram Sivaraman

in *Jugalbandhi*

The mridangam maestro who played for the movie 'Mridanga Chakravarti' featuring the Tamil star Sivaji Ganeshan.

Some readers might have enjoyed the first performance of the UK tour at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London on 20th April.

Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman may be considered the world's most accomplished and versatile mridangam player who is a pioneer in his field. Last year major festivals were held in Delhi and Madras to celebrate his 50 years of service to Indian classical music. He has toured world wide, including in USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Germany, Holland and Belgium. He has played for most of the top artists in India and played for All India Radio, Radio Ceylon and Doordarshan TV.

The first half of ***Jugalbandhi*** *is devoted to melody, the percussion having full scope in the second half.*

A programme such as this is an example of new directions in Indian classical music, all made possible by K.S. Bhavani Shanker of Samudra who arranged the tour. The overriding reason for this undertaking is his eagerness to make the mridangam, his own instrument, more well known and popular. He is sure that Umayalpuram Sivaraman, who has the ability to charm any audience, is the best person to do this.

Further performances: Sun. 4 May at 6.30, Birmingham Library Theatre, Chamberlain Square, B3, 0121 236 5622; Fri. 9 May at 8.00, Bluecoats Arts Centre, School Lane, Liverpool, 0151 709 5297; Sat. 10 May at 7.00, Oldham 6th Form College, Union West St., Oldham, 0161 911 4072. Edinburgh date to be confirmed.

Garani and Divani Blossom to Fame

The two lovely talented sisters Garani and Divani, daughters of Gowri and Ravi Nadaraja of Hayward, San Francisco and pupils of Guru Mythili Kumar blossomed into promising Bharatha Natya artistes at their arangetram at the Hoffman Theater, Walnut Creek in the Bay Area, which was packed to capacity with an appreciative audience.

The first item 'Sri Vignaraajam Bhaje' & 'Alarippu' was executed with such meticulous precision that it induced an instant aesthetic sensitivity in the spell bound audience. It paved the way for the most absorbing attractive dance of the evening, 'Ainthu Sabai Natanam', depicting the dances of Lord Shiva in the five sacred halls in Chidamparam, Madurai, Thirunelvelli, Kutralam and Thiruvaalangadu. It was made georgeous by the precise backdrop of the five great temples which were timely focused at the rear of the stage to highlight the significance of each dance. The Ardhanarisvara dance in Kutralam, a pose of which appears above and the dance competition between Shiva and Kali in Thiruvaalangadu were a real treat. This dance piece was fabulous, revealing the flawless footwork and their mastery of exquisite expressions.

This was followed by 'Abirami Stuti' verses from the famous 'Abirami Andaadi' praising the benevolent graceful mother goddess, which was aptly portrayed by the sisters. The next offering was a 'Varnam' composed by Subbudu in Ragam Valaji. The dancers beautifully depicted the feelings of Goddess Devaiyanai on the marriage of her husband to the hunter's daughter Valli. This item was interwoven with difficult jathis and statuesque poses which were as exotic as their enchanting costumes.

Taking the stage next was 'Thirumal Paraval' from the ancient epic Silapathikaram with the scintillating song 'Vadavaraiyai Mathakki'. Here the sisters depicted the deeds of Lord Vishnu with great expertise.

The tempo of the arangetram changed with Garani performing a solo rendition of Paapanaasam Sivan's 'Naan Oru Vilaiyattu Bommaiya' and Divani's solo of Bharathi's ever popular 'Dhiku Theriyaadhu Kaattil', which were both executed with graceful gestures, excellent footwork, remarkable facial expresions and swift movements.

The immaculate stage arrangements, the extraordinary fitting costumes, eye catching ornaments and delicate make-up blended with their dynamic performance. Their Guru Jythili Kumar, well known among the maestros has given much of herself in imparting her art and skill to her worthy students. Her Nattuvangam, the reverberating vocal of Asha, pulsating Mirudangam of N. Narayanan and Kan-

chira of P.V. Natarajan, stimulating Violin of Shanthi Narayanan and swashbuckling Flute of Dr. P.T. Narasimhan contributed towards the success of the memorable evening. The arangetram marked the recognition of the unflinching encouragement, dedication and persevering efforts of the parents Gowri and Ravi in arranging the recital so efficiently and smoothly.

It was undoubtedly a delightful evening to be remembered. Many in the auditorium wondered, 'Should such young, talented dancers ever give up this hard learned art?' and wished that they should continue in this unfathomable divine art.

Nandakumaran Navaratnam.

Anmeera's Arangetram in Switzerland

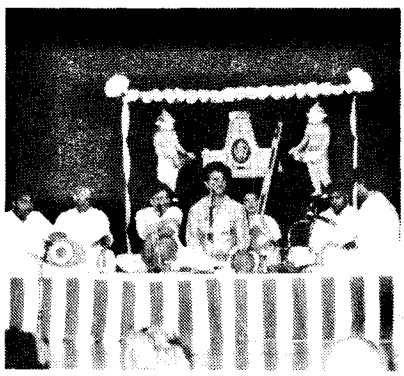
Ten-year-old Anmeera, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Sivanandam of Zurich, Switzerland had her Bharatha Natya Arangetram at the Kirch Gemein De Hall, Zurich on 22nd March 1997. She is a student of Natya Kalaimani Gnanasundari Vasan.

Anmeera started the performance with the traditional Pushpanjali, Alarippu and all the pieces that are essential for a full dance performance. Apart from the usual items like Varnam, Patham, Thillana, Anmeera performed the snake dance 'Nathar Mudi', the Kurathi dance and a dance on 'Our Motherland – Ealam' composed by Veeramani Iyer which was well received by the audience. Anmeera excelled in the Navarasa Patham 'Kannai Kavarum' in Ragamalika when she brought the nine moods in Ramayana so beautifully, for which she received a standing ovation.

Guru Gnanasundari is a Diploma Holder in Bharatha Natyam from the Fine Arts Academy of the Jaffna University with a lot of potential needed for a good teacher. The Chief Guest, Mrs. Moganraj (teacher of Guru Gnanasundari) in her speech praised the Guru and her pupil for the wonderful performance. Guest speakers were Mr. K. Sivanandan from Germany, Mr. Kumar G.G. Ponnambalam from Sri Lanka and Mr. N. Muralidaran, P. Anton from Zurich.

Anmeera was ably assisted by Smt Gnanasundari Vasan – Nattuvangam, Smt Ambika Thamotheram – Vocal, Sri Muthu Sivarajah – Mirdangam, Smt Komala Kandiah – Violin, Sri S. Sivaji – Flute and Sri T. Karunakaran – Tabla.

Piranavan's Mridanga Arangetram



The Mridanga Arangetram of fourteen-year-old Piranavan, son of Mr. & Mrs. K. Sucindran of Hampton and pupil of Guru Kirupakaran took place at the Beck Theatre, Hayes packed to capacity with an appreciative audience. He accompanied Rajkumar Bharathi, a popular vocalist from India. He is the great grandson of the great Tamil poet Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi, and had come from India specially only for this occasion.

The 'Cutcheri' was well structured and presented in two sessions. The first session contained two lively 'Tanis' – percussion ensemble – with Mridangam, Ghatam and Morsing and all the artistes played wonderfully. Kothandapani provided neat accompaniment on Violin throughout the concert. Piranavan seems to possess a natural flair for mridangam and has a good sense of appreciation of music. His solo during the 'thani' contained very interesting patterns including good weaving of 'chatusra' and 'trisra' nadais. In both the 'thani' mention should be made of the novel 'kuraippu' before the final 'mohara' and 'mukthayam'. Guru Kirupakaran has made great efforts with his brilliant teaching and credit goes to Piranavan for his faithful execution. Prakash rolls his fingers effortlessly on the ghatam and Sithamparanathan produces good sound on the 'morsing' with which he seems to carry along his audience. Arrthy Sivakumar who had her vocal arangetram recently played the Thambura.

Piranavan apart from the 'thanis', also provided good accompaniment to Rajkumar Bharathi. All the artistes received tremendous encouragement from the vocalist and it was rapturous for the audience.

Rajkumar sang two detailed alapanas of Thodi and Kalyani. Papanasam Sivan's 'Thanigai Valar' and Thiagarajah's 'Eta Vunara' with niraval and saram were rendered with telling effect. His rendering of 'Chinnanchiru Kiliye' was soulful with scintillating tune in three ragas – Mohanakalyani, Sivaranjani and Kanada. The concert ended with a lilting 'Thillana' in 'Tilang'.

The Chief Guests were Mr. Toby Jessel, M.P., for Twickenham, Chairman Indo-British Parliamentary Group and Mrs. Jessel. The Guests of Honour were Smt Saraswathy Packiyarajah and Dr. & Mrs. Niththyananthan. Compering was excellently done by two of Piranavan's cousins Gajan Sritharan and Ananthhi Nitkunan. Piranavan's little sister Yalini delivered the vote of thanks.

Overall it was a very delectable Arangetram. Well done Piranavan.

First Sri Lankan Appointed

Mr. T. Kandasamy of South Australia has been appointed a Civil Marriage Celebrant for the whole of Australia. He is the first Sri Lankan to be appointed in Australia. He is also the first Sri Lankan to be appointed a Justice of Peace in South Australia.

He has successfully completed a course in Criminology and is following courts procedures in Magistrates Courts before being called to the Bench.

For Sale

Land in Mabole, Wattala, Sri Lanka, 22.4 perches with old house adjoining main Colombo – Negombo Road in Industrial Area. Rs. 100,000 per perch O.N.O. E 76 c/o Tamil Times.

Vazhuvoor Style
Bharatha Natyam Classes

By Mrs. Nandini Suthahar daughter and pupil of well known teacher, **Kalabooshanam** Mrs. Thiripurasundari Yoganantham. For particulars please contact: 'Kalaimanram', 139 Lynton Road, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Middx. HA2 9NH. Tel: 0181 422 7031.

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